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HEIRESS
OF
THE BLACKBURNFOOT.

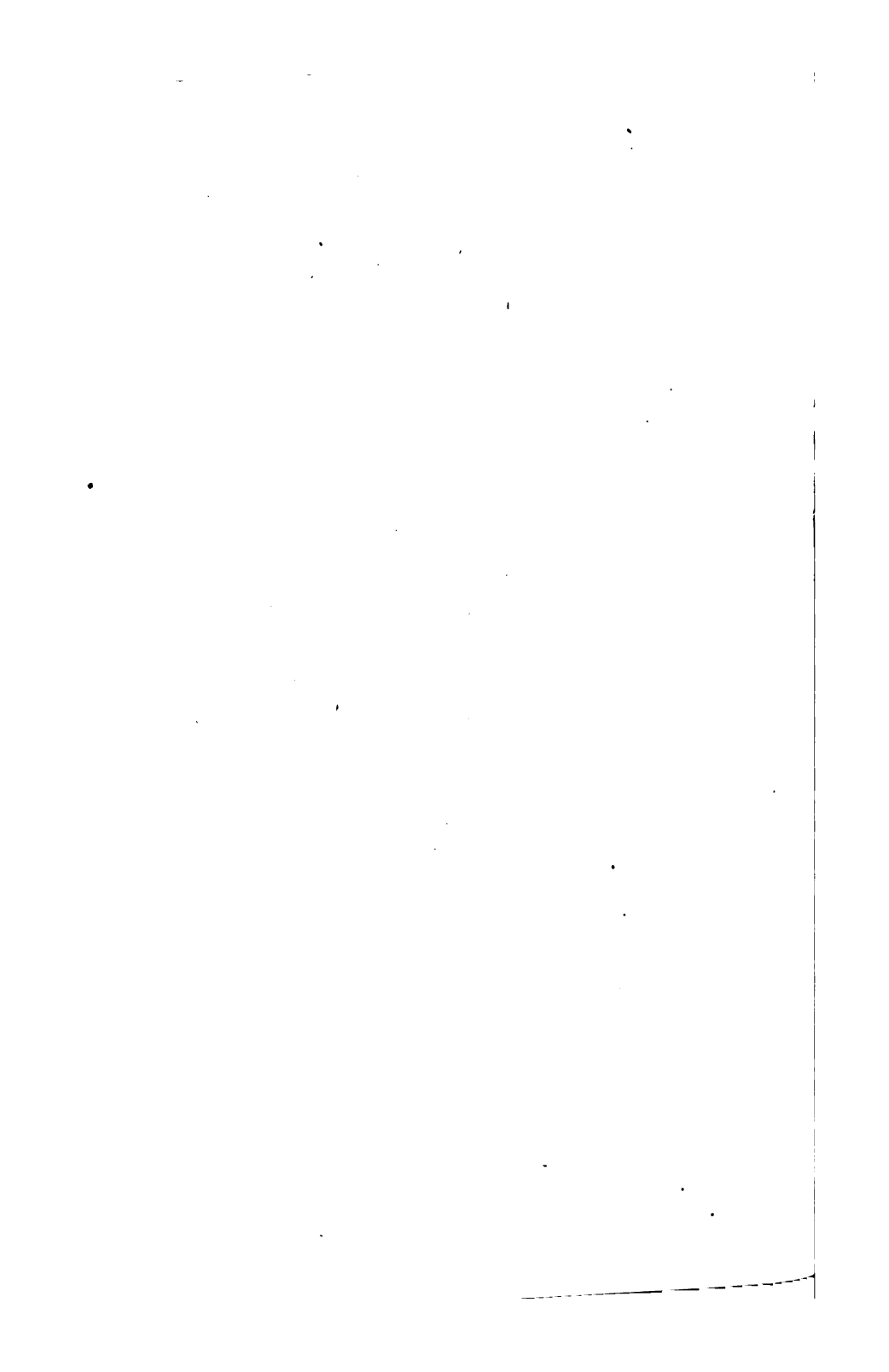
A Tale of Rural Scottish Life.

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

LONDON :
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1865.

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HEIRESS
OF
THE BLACKBURNFOOT.

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2

HEIRESS OF THE BLACKBURNFOOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACKBURNFOOT.

"Let Fortune's gifts at random flee."

"AND here comes our daughter Mary, gentlemen," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"Exceedingly glad to make Miss Hamilton's acquaintance," returned the city lawyer, softly offering his palm, with an oily deference that told of figures five in a row.

"Mary would have been here before, gentlemen," said Hamilton, of Blackburnfoot, a fine old man with warm blue eye and artistic head, "but she was makin' up the butter, and had to clean herself."

2 HEIRESS OF THE BLACKBURNFOOT.

The mother looked sagaciously at her husband. Certainly he might have "spoken genteeler," and that "such a fine, gentlemanny lookin' young man."

The poor match-making woman, she failed to see that this lawyer's clerk would be but a poor marriage now-a-days for her bonny Mary, heiress of the Blackburnfoot.

The "genteel young man" looked at Mary with no small admiration, as she stood smiling up at the lawyer, while he offered his congratulation, showing off a face fair as Virginia's, fine dark blue eyes and exquisite teeth.

"Your daughter?" asked a coarse, hard-featured man, coming forward.

"Our only one, lad or lass," said the mother, looking round her with a look that said more plainly than tongue could, "What do you think of that?"

"Then," cried the man, seizing Mary's hand, "I wish her health and happiness, and may her days be long in the land. Your health, miss." And he refilled the glass which he had drained to pledge success to his bargain. "Your health, miss, and may you get a husband something like, for he'll be a lucky fellow."

• • • • •

The shadow of sorrowful regret over the old man might have been supposed to indicate that the bargain just concluded was not quite advantageous, but for the beaming satisfaction of his wife.

The Hamiltons of Blackburnfoot, were the younger branch of "the Hamiltons of Stanecroft and the Blackburnfoot," who had been well-to-do landowners more than two hundred years. Two hundred years before, George Hamilton of Stanecroft and the Blackburnfoot, was no mean man in the parish of Boniton, as might be inferred from the fact that the parish kirkyard did not please him as a burying-place. He built a desolate place for himself—a family sepulchre—into which when he had been gathered in a ripe old age, his lands were parted between his two sons; George, the elder, becoming laird of Stanecroft, John, the younger, of the Blackburnfoot.

James Hamilton, great-grandson of this John Hamilton, has this day signed a writ, empowering "the said Matthew Thomson" to dig or mine for coal, ironstone, &c. in any portion or portions of "the said lands of the Blackburnfoot."

During the last summer, strange-looking men had been more than once or twice surprised poking about the black burn with hammers and nappers, till Hamilton, in his ancestral dread of trespassers,

set himself to watch for them, with his two collie dogs. It was thus that he, one fine morning, captured "the said Matthew Thomson"—a hammer in one hand, a piece of some rocky substance in the other.

Thomson, upon being indignantly questioned—for to be severe with trespassers was a duty of two hundred years precedent among the Hamiltons—Thomson, so questioned, admitted that he was searching for coal, and rather thought he was "on the scent of blackband."

"And what's that to you, or any man?" cried Blackburnfoot, his eyes flashing. "What's that to you, or any man, if it's in my lands?"

"I would be willing to come down as handsome as any man," said Thomson, staring. Old landed proprietors were a sort of lunatic he had experience of, but little patience with.

As Hamilton and his two collie dogs walked him off the premises, Thomson tried hard to make him take a practical view of the matter. His proposals were rejected with disdain. "Never! He would leave the lands to Mary, though she was but a lass," as his father had left them to him.

The neighbours heard of it. True to the fable of "The father, his son, and their ass," all cried

out, "A pit in the braes couldn't harm the people. Agriculturally, what were they worth? This last summer, hadn't a fine cow fallen over them into the burn, and broken her neck?"

Blackburnfoot groaned at the remembrance. For "wronging the bit lassie," the money so obtained would make a "perfect leddy of her." Most unjust it was to her to set the thing aside.

The wily coal-master never gave up the pursuit. It ended in Blackburnfoot setting his signature to the deed aforesaid, drawn out by a city lawyer. He set to his seal with a heavy heart, and "James Hamilton and his aforesaid" came into possession of money in heaps, more fable-like to the simple man, than the dimly remembered legend of Aladdin and the wonderful lamp.

CHAPTER II.

STANECROFT.

"She milked the dun cow that ne'er offered to stir;
Though wicked it was, it was gentle to her."

It was the afternoon of next day. Blackburnfoot had hoped that old Stanecroft, the head of the family, would come to offer his congratulations; but the old man came not. No, not even young George had come. It was too plain how they looked on the affair. He had lowered himself, and he had lowered his family, by basely bargaining to gut the ancient lands of the Blackburnfoot. Unable longer to endure this state of self-reproach, he set off for Stanecroft, taking Mary with him.

Stanecroft was surrounded by farm-labourers, in a field adjoining his house:—an old man, of a grotesquely gentlemanlike air, in a swallow-tailed coat of dark green cloth, his finely turned shanks

cased in dark woollen stockings, to the knee, and a broad-brimmed hat.

Perceiving Blackburnfoot, he sung out in terribly loud tones,—“ Well, James Hamilton, so you’ve sold the lands ? ”

“ Not just so bad as that, laird,” returned his cousin, sorely mortified because of the laird’s addressing him as ‘ James Hamilton,’ not ‘ Blackburnfoot,’ as was his wont, “ only the minerals.”

“ Sold the orange all but the peel,” mercilessly laughed the laird, and a broad grin went round his workers.

“ He’ll hardly be fashed wi’ moles noo, I reckon,” said a roguish-looking man, spreading a huge mole-hill of richest soil.

This sally was met by one roar of laughter by the laird and all his men. Blackburnfoot almost wished himself quietly laid to rest with his fathers, under the dome of the old family burying-place that now met his eye.

“ But my father’s got a heap o’ siller, laird,” cried little Mary, vexed by her father’s troubled face.

“ That may be, lass, that may be ; but siller’s siller, and land’s land.”

This observation came to poor Blackburnfoot

with terrible power. Why had no one set it so clearly before him, till it was too late? . . . In the parlour were the mistress, Miss Betsy, and Miss Eelin.

"I've come, mistress," said the laird, "I've come to introduce a new acquaintance—James Hamilton, Esq., of nowhere, and laird of that ilk."

"My father's as guid a laird's ever he was," cried little Mary, hotly, for her father's crushed look went to her very heart. "My father's as guid a laird's ever he was; and what's more, he has a heap more siller than some folks."

Whether it was that our little Mary was all unaccustomed to the offensive or defensive, or whether it was that George Hamilton, who now appeared in the doorway, must have heard her vaunting speech, which she now felt was, like most hasty words, far from kind, she burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing and weeping.

George stepped forward quickly, as if he would fain have caught her to his heart, saying resentfully, "Who was it vexed her?"

"No person vexed her that I saw," said Miss Betsy, sharply.

"It's the laird fleerin' an' floutin' at my father, as if my father wasn't as good as him, or anybody else!" sobbed Mary.

eric woollen stockings, to the knee, and
a worn hat.

Young Blackburnfoot, he sung out in terribly
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haps, that he was supposed to hold a rank higher than his cousin Blackburnfoot, who had always been ready to do simply anything. The same distinction of rank held good in the case of the "mistress of Stanecroft" and "Kirstie Hamilton of Blackburnfoot." But it was a finer, an airier distinction, lying chiefly in an atmosphere of negation, in which the mistress of Stanecroft contrived to move with consummate skill. This lady insisted on a right to spend at least one half of this life in strict incognito. What she did during her morning hours, who had a right to know? It was understood to be a mystery, and this placed her far above honest Kirstie Hamilton, who frankly managed her own dairy.

It was said by some that early intruders had met the mistress full in the face, her arms dripping from the wash-tub, or her woollen apron filled with eggs from the hen-loft; yea, that she had been caught in the act of carrying a fiercely boiling kettle towards an empty churn; but the mysterious appearance stared them in the face, and passed on, no ray of consciousness lighting the stony eye. Was it, could it be, the Mistress of Stanecroft? A grand haze hung around her proceedings, and she took rank accordingly.

In the afternoons, in her cap with red ribbons,

she was grand, affable, and always at leisure. Suppose she went of an afternoon to see Kirstie Hamilton, that poor woman might demean herself by saying,—

“ If you’ll excuse me, I’ll gie the lass a han’ wi’ ‘ kickin’ Jean.’ She canna’ manage her.”

The mistress smiled condescendingly, implying that she would excuse her, but it was a thing much out of her own way. Therefore, although Kirstie Hamilton knew that she had that very morning milked “ dunshin’ Bess,” and “ flingin’ Mysie,” two animals in comparison of whom her “ kickin’ Jean ” was a simpleton, she somehow couldn’t believe it.

George, the son, was the best manager of a horse, the best guide of the plough, the best hand at a flail, on his father’s farm, while his sisters were never seen to do anything but sew ; therefore, they also held a different rank from Mary of Blackburnfoot, whose little hands were far more familiar with butter and wooden rollers, than calico and scissors. . . .

The Stanecroft girls had talked of little but Mary and her splendid prospects for the last two days. They were delighted now to expatiate on the subject to herself. She should have a new silk dress and bonnet, “ instead of that dowdy, dowdy straw with the blue ribbons.”

That is, if they were in her place they would.

Mary listened very sweetly, but with a lack of interest her listeners were themselves too interested to observe.

During this long talk their brother George came twice tramping into the parlour: once seeking a hammer, next the key of the corn chest, in the cupboard.

His sisters marvelled how George came to suppose such things could be there. Certainly he knew, they said, such things never were kept there.

Besides, George was in no sweet humour, for hearing them, on his second entrance, pronounce the little bonnet with the blue ribbons, "dowdy, dowdy," he went out, slapping the door after him, leaving the air vibrating—some say to vibrate evermore—with the cruel words—

"Neither of you ever had a bonnet on your heads in the least like it, that's certain!"

The sisters' wrath at this attack on these structures raised by their own hands ran high, and Mary, a roguish smile lurking about the corners of her mouth, rose, and crossed to the kitchen, seeking there—we are ashamed to say it of the young heiress—seeking there, pursuits more congenial to her tastes.

There the two lasses were, pails in hand, going a-milking.

Mary proposed giving them "a hand wi' 'flingin' Mysie.'"

"A han' wi' 'flingin' Mysie,' Mary lassie!" laughed the mistress. "Oh, Mary lassie, are ye never to learn to be a leddy?"

Mary flushed up with vexation, she scarce knew why.

"But by all means gie them a han' wi' 'flingin' Mysie,' if you like. And see she doesn't hurt ye, bairn," said the mistress, with some kindness, as she watched her tuck up her gown and tie on a great woollen apron.

"No, no," said Mary, tripping out pail in hand, "I think I hae the way o' her."

The ungracious brute threatened at first to be restive, but thought better of it, and stood quiet as a lamb. For what brute so irreclaimably ungracious, as not to be conquered by that sweetly nestling head leant to her side, and the soft touch of the little hands?

The lasses marvelled at Mary's success, as Sally—despite of George (who had accidentally heard the noise) coming to hold the animal's head—Sally raised such a rumpus with "dunshin' Bess," that it ended

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in her looking over a whole pile of milk. From she
 particularly mentioned that "the young lady
 would notice her milk milk" was this did not
 shield her from the severe displeasure of her mis-
 tress, who told her to see how "even so one might
 say, a lady. The Mary Hamilton, could manage a
 bear."

CHAPTER III.

THE AUNTS.

“ And out they came,
Trustees, and aunts, and uncles. ‘What! with him?’ ”

As Mary and the two lasses came from the byre, bearing brimming pails, they were arrested by Mary’s mother, accompanied by two trim female figures, Mary’s aunts, her mother’s sisters.

It was thought a high marriage for Kirstie Burns when James Hamilton, of the Blackburnfoot (then a man of full five-and-forty years,) made her his wife. To the more poetic attractions of her “boardly shoulders” and “gimp waist,” the idea was ever added in Hamilton’s mind, of her “genty way o’ workin’.”

The “gentiness” was long since with the things that were; the handsome Kirstie had grown into a not over tidy-looking wife, but the honest work

remained, and consequently, she appeared handsome as ever in her husband's eyes, for "handsome is that handsome does."

From some circumstances in her sisters' lives, two ideas had got complete possession of them—"genteelity" and "the town." And somehow these two ideas were to them one. "Genteelity" and "the town" were to them synonyms, or at least the one found its only proper sphere in the other.

To be "genteel" almost implied that one's residence was "the town."

To be in "the town" gave one a very decided chance at being "genteel."

Their father and mother had consented to their taking lodgings in "the town," and trying their fortune as milliners there.

Their talent for gentility helped them marvellously, and at the time our history opens, we find Miss Jane and Miss Catherine Burns, first-class milliners, more devoted, if that were possible, to "gentility" and "the town" than ever.

The "vulgar, vulgar upbringing" of their sister's only child had been, all along, an inexhaustible topic of lamentation with them, often descanted upon to the better acquainted and more complaisant portion of their lady customers, while at

the same time, her good pretensions to better things were carefully enforced and exaggerated.

The Blackburnfoot connection was, in truth, their chief stronghold with regard to "gentility," and a lamentation over "the ridic'ulous way that young miss was kep'," gave them in their own eyes no small importance.

It may be imagined, then, that on hearing of this sudden fortune, they left town, and sought the rural shades, in order to fulfil the important duty of insisting upon "Mary's being made quite a genteel miss," and being no longer permitted to remain in the terribly vulgar state in which she had been brought up.

"If she's not hopeless vulgar already," sighed Miss Catherine.

"She's not quite sixteen yet," replied Miss Jane; "if she had two or three years of a fashionable, stylish boarding-school, she might come to talk quite genteel yet. But we had best go out immediately, or her father 'll think all he has to do with his money is to buy another dozen cows, and hire a lass to help Mary to milk them."

So these benevolent females arrived at the Blackburnfoot on this evening. There they found Mary gone to Stanecroft. They came, carrying a bonnet-box

"It's a bonnet for Mary," said Miss Jane; "quite a stylish bonnet, just such as she requires now."

The poor mother admired the bonnet fully, and feeling very uneasy under her sisters' sharp eyes, in her homely gown, ground out,—

"Our Mary 'll not know herself, it's that grand."

"Not know herself! And who should have a stylish bonnet if it's not her? Only she's such a young miss. I think it's genteeler for her to be kep' plain yet."

"The thing for her," interrupted Miss Catherine, "is to be kep' real plain, and sent to the boarding-school—quite a fashionable, stylish boarding-school—no expenses saved. Do you hear that, father?" she continued, turning to Blackburnfoot; "Mary must be sent to the boarding-school immediately."

"Mary! Mary to a boarding-school?" broke out Hamilton, quite bemazed by the attack. "Send Mary to a boarding-school!"

"To be sure," cried Miss Jane; "Mary must learn to be a lady—she must be made something genteel."

"No doubt she'll be rich, very rich," said the father, a strange bewildered look coming over his face.

"Very rich," chimed in Miss Catherine, "and

what's to hinder that she should be quite the stylish, fashionable young lady? And as to her being at *Stonecroft*," continued she, tossing her head, "you should take the greatest care, sister, that her affecshings are kep' free till she comes back from the boarding-school, and let her get her chance at some regular stylish young fellow."

"Well, they're no ways taken up that I know of," said the mother, with a shadow of a sense of a cause for some censure in her manner.

"Well, but just running to *Stonecroft*" (these ladies always pronounced it so): "there's that George, quite a vulgar brought-up lad, quite out of Mary's way now. And then you should think what an awful thing love is, if the affecshings oncet get engaged."

These ladies were often sorely at a loss to reconcile their two creeds of "all for love and sentiment," and "all for fashion and style." This was by no means the first dilemma of the kind that had engaged their attention.

Mrs. Hamilton and her sisters set out for *Stonecroft*, where they arrived just in time to meet Mary bearing the reaming pail of milk, drawn by her own small hands from "flingin' Mysie."

Great was the disgust of the aunts to find her so

employed, to see her stand there, blushing and bashful, and perhaps greater, as the words broke kindly from her pretty lips,—

“Ye’ve got a rale bonny nicht.”

“A very nice evening, Mary,” said Miss Catherine, emphatically.

Neither did George escape their sharp eyes. On the whole, their displeasure was high.

“Mary would try her hand on flingin’ Mysie,” said the mistress of Stanecroft, when they had settled themselves in the parlour.

The smart city manners of the aunts exercised an uneasy influence over even the mistress of Stanecroft.

“But Mary must put her hand to nothing now,” replied Miss Jane, sharply. “Mary’s a real lady now, none of your pretence gentry.”

The Stanecroft girls could not but feel this a hit at them, though it would be bad policy to show they felt it so.

“What Mary must do,” said Miss Catherine, “is to go immediately to the boarding-school, a fashionable” — and so on, as we have heard.

It was very wrong of George to tear across the farm-yard, grinding his teeth, and muttering, as he vehemently rubbed down his favourite horse,—

"The old ——" but what he said could not be overheard.

"Mary must set herself to learn the music," says Miss Catherine, turning to her mother. This was meant as a blow to the Stanecroft ladies, for their parlour did not boast of a piano.

Yet to show that it was not quite beyond them, Miss Betsy remarked,—“We meant to learn the music, but it takes such a time; I suppose nobody could do anything to it under a quarter?”

“A quarter, indeed!” laughed Miss Catherine; “that may do for a country lassie—misses takes years to it.”

The aunts insisted on carrying off Mary that very hour, and so they all set off for the Blackburnfoot.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHAT TO DO "IMMEDIATELY."

"For I have gear in plenty,
And love says it's my duty,
To ware what heaven has lent me,
Upon your wit and beauty."

WHAT to do "immediately" was, indeed, a hard question for Mary's anxious aunts. The long evenings of early summer showed that schools were just breaking up for the season; yet, in her case, to lose months was out of the question. On after consideration, it seemed an advantage to have two or three months before she could go to school.

"We'll get her polished up a good deal before going there, and that'll give her a different start just at oncet," Miss Jane remarked to her sister.

And now a bright idea broke upon them. They fashioned gowns and bonnets for a certain Mrs.

Simons, a widow lady, who held a situation as governess in one of the chief schools in town. She might be induced to spend the summer vacation at the Blackburnfoot.

These two dominant women proceeded to town to negotiate this, while her mother imparted to Mary that they had gone "to hire a governish to stop over the summer time."

"A governess!—to stop here!—to be aye stopping here!—to watch a body frae mornin' till night! Oh, mother, that'll be awful. I'll never dare do a thing, but sit on a stuff-bottom chair the hail day, like some silly body."

Poor Mary's remonstrances were vain. Her aunts returned to see to the house being put to rights. Mrs. Simons would be at the Blackburnfoot in a fortnight.

How to make the modest accommodation look genteelest, was a difficult problem for the aunts to solve. The Farmer must have his own parlour, untouched and unchanged, and the kitchen was a vulgar necessity. The upstairs rooms, with their cross lights, were cheerful and pretty. One of them was set aside for Mary's use. Probably because it was his Mary's room, it was a pet place of Blackburnfoot's, for storing up any very favourite article.

His hedge-knives stood there, and divers other articles he liked to know were in good keeping. At this time, a bag of very superior bean-meal stood in the corner, opened, and in use from time to time. All this, upon inspection, met the eyes of the dismayed aunts.

The room opposite was a complete storehouse. How could such a place be got into readiness for the stylish Mrs. Simons? Aunt Catherine was ready to give the thing up. Not so, aunt Jane; her spirit rose with difficulties.

While these ladies reconnoitred the premises in anything but an amiable spirit, Mary brushed upstairs, carrying a wooden trough, into which she carefully dealt a portion of the bean-meal from the sack in the corner, when her aunts pounced upon her from the opposite door.

"Well, I declare! What *are* you about, Mary?"

"Kickin' Jean's rale done," said Mary, simply, as if the fact would draw the immediate sympathy of all hearers.

"Kickin' Jean! Who is 'kickin' Jean?' What should you know about kickin' Jeans, Mary? All cows should be one and the same to a young lady; animals that supplies the family with milk, and if

you lose one, surely you're rich enough to get another."

Mary flushed up, and her indignant eyes shot blue lights.

"It's no' the siller, though it's a sair thing to lose a beast, but Jean's been so guid a beast. Mother says if it hadna' been her giein' milk, that winter I had the hoopin' cough, I wad ne'er ha' been here."

"Come now, Mary, don't demean yourself that way," interposed Miss Catherine, more softly; "Jenny'll see to Jean, or your mother."

"I'll see to Jean, though I should sit up a' nicht wi' her. Jenny, indeed! Set the puir beast a kickin' if she comes within a yard o' her. She has no way wi' her at a'."

"Well, Mary, you're the provokingest girl," cried aunt Jane, hotly. But Mary was off and away, flushed and passionate, to smooth down the moment she approached the sickly Jean. How soothingly she held the nice hot mash to her as she patted and fondled the cross old head. It would have been a luxury to any one to be so nursed.

"I told you before," said aunt Catherine, "she's quite hopeless. I think we may just as well leave her to herself."

"I would if she wasn't so pretty," said aunt Jane. "You don't know how she would look well dressed. She holds her tongue a good deal, and gentlemen likes these shy, quiet girls,—that's them that's as pretty as that."

Aunt Jane was right. The Hamiltons hadn't been Hamiltons of Stanecroft and the Blackburn-foot for two hundred years, that a daughter of the house should be a mere farm-servant. From the dimpled little hand to the finely-turned foot, there was not one vulgar curve or line in face or form,—a plump little rustic Hebe, not a dairy-maid. Neither was low or mean sentiment lodged in her guileless heart, or uttered by her pretty lips. Not that aunt Jane thought so, for it was, perhaps, to be regretted, that this bonny lassie's mother tongue was undiluted Scotch, and her occupations belonging rather to the times of the patriarchs than to her own. But who doubts that the beautiful Rebekah, hasting to empty the water from her pitcher into the camel's trough, and running again to the well till the ten weary camels were done drinking, while the man wondering at her, held his peace—who doubts that this gladsome Hebrew maid was a lady? Well, and I hold that my bonny Mary had much of the lady about her.

The aunts put the house to rights with great vigour. Blackburnfoot did not observe what they were about, till they had all his grain and meal-bags turned out. He remarked somewhat thankfully to his wife,—

"Your sisters make themselves very happy upstairs."

He felt their absence from his parlour a relief.

Some eight days after, he went one evening, to get some article from his store-room. He stared round on entering, with a half-scared feeling, that his life now was a mocking threatening of grandeur and pretence, instead of the quiet, homely life he liked. Where was his store-room, where things were aye sure to be so dry and safe? He stood in an elegant parlour, with white draped windows, a carpet blushing with flowers, and a big mahogany box on legs, that he did believe was a "piany."

It first glanced across his mind that it was some mocking work of the Evil One, who had tempted him to hollow out the lands, but from that, he quickly thought of his wife's sisters.

"It's their work, it's their work," he sighed, heavily, "and they'll take my only bairn frae me, the bit nicest lassie in the country side. But maybe it maun be," he muttered, as he went to the back

window and looked down on the beautiful burn below, and the thought came to him of how many thousands Mary would have. He stepped softly about, examining things.

"Maybe, our Mary must have such things," he muttered to himself, as he fumbled at the piano to get it open. From that he went to try the keys, first softly, then somewhat too heavily. He was saying to himself with no little complacency,—

"Weel, it does really make a pretty sort o' sound," when aunt Jane, attracted by the noise, came in.

It enraged her, that Blackburnfoot's hands should make so free with the keys, that the beringed fingers of the dashing, stylish Mrs. Simons were to play upon. She wouldn't have them soiled for the world.

"What sort of fingers are these now, to put on a piany fort? It mustn't be thumped on, you'll put it all out of tune. You can't think how vulgar that'll look. Just as if there wasn't a single party in the house had an ear."

Blackburnfoot got up from the chair on which he had settled himself before the instrument.

"And my nice chair! Well, I declare! only look how you've spiled it! All siled and crumpled like anything!"

Hamilton looked, and felt sorry, undoubtedly the muslin slip looked the worse.

"And only look at the marks of your feet on the carpet! Well, that really is aggravating! Look at the straws and the red earth, nearly every step you've took! You really shouldn't come here, it's no place for you."

Hamilton, just and gentle as he was, could stand no more. The ruddy apple tint flushed from cheek to brow, and his strong grey eyes flashed with indignation.

"Who are you to come here and talk so to me? Is this not my own house? are these not my own things? bought with my money, without my leave so much as asked? Is this not my store-room, and how dare you carry off my meal-bags? But I'll tell you what, you'll bring none o' your outlandish governishes here, I'll have no such baggage in my house."

"Such language is quite like you," retorted aunt Jane, scornfully. "Brought up your only child, drudging at it like a slave, and now you're rich, instead of being a lady, as I would have made her, if you had taken my advice, she affronts herself and all her friends, with her low, vulgar ways."

"Low, vulgar ways, mistress? do you dare to

say that to me, in this house!" spurted out Hamilton, gasping with passion. "Mary is as far your superior as——" but he couldn't hit on a comparison, and Mary, white and frightened, entered the room.

"What's the matter, father dear?" said she, going up, and laying hold of his arm.

Her father only fell back a pace, glaring fiercely at aunt Jane.

"Only that your father is what he always was, an unreasingable, wrong-headed, low man, and that I leave this house this very evening."

"The suner the better," cried Mary. "My father's ower guid to talk to the like o' ye. Low man!" she cried, stamping her little foot, then according to her usual custom fell a-crying.

Then came the mother.

"What's wrong, guid man? What's a' this?"

"I'm sure I know nothing about it," said he, as, vexed and ashamed, he flung out of the room. Mary's tears had fallen like cold water on his flaming wrath. "I shouldn't hae vexed her, I'm always hasty. There must be something done wi' her, or so much siller 'll be anything but a pleasure to her. But that provokin' cratur Jean Burns aye put me mad all my days."

Meanwhile Jane Burns's sister reasoned with

her upon the folly of taking up so hotly, hasty words, spoken, she doubted not, under great provocation, trying vainly to persuade her that to forget and forgive, on both sides, was best.

"Just stop ower the nicht, an' the morn ye'll no can think what ye were fechtin' about."

Aunt Jane held to her point that he had as good as ordered her out of the house, and instantly set about packing up.

"Dinna' bid her stop, mother," cried Mary, "I canna' bide her after what she said to my father."

So the aunts packed up and left, declaring that Mary's was a pitiable case, but that they could do nothing to help it. . . . A week after, they received a letter in Mary's round, childish handwriting, stating that her father desired to make up their foolish quarrel, and that they expected to see the governess at the time appointed. Mary's mother held her husband to "the governess," she had been thoroughly roused by her sisters to make a lady of Mary. He was besides uneasy under the quarrel, and anxious to make it up.

On the day appointed, Mrs. Simons arrived at the Blackburnfoot.

Mrs. Hamilton had got ready tea, in the upstairs parlour, of which repast, by the aunts' orders,

Mrs. Simons was to partake in elegant solitude. But fate would have it otherwise, for just then our friend the lawyer's clerk appeared crossing the court. Yes, it was he, and no other, for Mrs. Hamilton had not allowed him to leave the house that first evening, without saying,—

“And if ever you're in these pairts, Mr. Paterson, we'll always be glad to see you.”

So Alick arrived, and was most heartily welcomed by Mrs. Hamilton, who was right glad to see him just then, as he could “talk to the governish,” a task for which she felt herself altogether unequal. So tea was fated to be a social meal.

The governess and Mr. Paterson got on less amicably than she had hoped, for aunt Jane had lectured her on how careful she must be “to keep back all beaux in the meantime, as Mary's aim must now be so much higher than anything that could possibly offer at present.” So Mrs. Simons was lofty, sarcastic, and severe, in reply to all Alick's attempts at really cultivated and intelligent chatter.

Her saucy manners made our little party feel constrained. Even Alick Paterson's smooth-going tongue worked heavily. But the evening was fated to be a social one.

Just as Blackburnfoot rose from the tea-table and sauntered to the back window, he called out—

"There's cousin John, I declare, coming up the garden!"

Cousin John was a bachelor of full fifty years, and his farm, and all that was his, were looked on as their own some day, by his brother's sons and daughters.

Cousin John had come to see the new "governish." For cousin John was ambitious. Ambition was to blame for his being a bachelor, at such untoward years. He never could bear the idea of marrying an ordinary country lass. He had once—but the fact seemed to be known by no one—he had once made advances to the minister's daughter, hoping she would consider his case, seeing she was the eldest of at least one dozen, and quite without fortune. The young lady had declined, not rudely, but with so much amusement shining in her lambent eyes, that cousin John had bitten his fingers full fifteen years after it. In the sixteenth year, just as he was biting harder than ever, enraged by the obviously appropriative tendencies of these insufferable lads his nephews, the fame of the "governish," who was coming to the Blackburnfoot, reached his ears. "A governish!" here was a new idea. He

would see her at least. He ceased gnawing his digits, visited the city to order a new suit, and finally took the road for the Blackburnfoot.

Having been duly introduced to Mrs. Simons, cousin John seated himself at the opposite end of the room, and considered her diligently by means of turning up his large round ox eyes, while he proportionately depressed his head. A mode of observation much practised by men of humble origin and of ambitious mind. They seem to think that if the object of their observation might consider itself somewhat above them, they can by this manœuvre observe, without its being observed that they are observing.

Mrs. Hamilton meanwhile made one or two sallies on his bachelorhood, and when, and whom, he was to marry; saying to herself, good woman, "I'll just let her know, that he's a likely like beau."

Mrs. Simons left her seat, and moved to the window overlooking the linn, where stood Mary and Alick Paterson, just as Mary, in reply to some observation of Alick's, was saying, with all the romance of her sweet young spirit looking out of her eyes, "Oh, it's a rale bonny quate bit."

Mrs. Simons laid her white hand lightly on her shoulder. Mary started and blushed.

"A tranquil spot, indeed, Miss Hamilton!" she said, her large blue-grey eyes looking up.

"Ay, that's nicely worded," chuckled cousin John to himself; "I like to hear wordin' like that."

These up-looking eyes of Mrs. Simons were what chiefly struck one, on first seeing her. I wonder has any one never met the sort of woman. Tallish, somewhat high cheek bones, brown-haired, originally rosy, with these big blue-grey eyes, well fringed, not very deep, not very soft, but with that constant air of appeal to heaven against any charge that may be laid to them, that we cannot believe much ill of them. *Much* I say, for the possessor is apt to be what we in Scotland call a "gomeril." Dear English reader, how can I translate? A "goose" is far too strong. She so thoroughly believes in all her own opinions, and her own ways, yet she may any day so completely change them, that is why I call her a "gomeril." This was Mrs. Simons's sort by birth, but she was much polished, much driven about, and had after her own way learned much.

"Have you a taste for scenery, Mrs. Simons?" asked Alick Paterson, chattering.

Mrs. Simons had seen enough of a certain would-be-cleverer-than-other-folks society, to look con-

temptuous at such attempts at conversation, but she answered languidly, with a grand 'look up,' "For all that is lovely in natural scenery, I have a passion."

Cousin John advanced up the floor, as if suddenly jerked by an unseen cord, and suggested that "Mrs. Simons might play a pairt on the piany."

The lady looked up, hesitated, then said—"I will with pleasure."

Cousin John did not offer his arm to lead her to the instrument, but he tucked his thumbs into his waistcoat, lowered his hard round head, and stood listening, much in the attitude of some untoward animal that meditates running *at* something.

Mrs. Simons played brilliantly, till Mrs. Hamilton announced that there was "a bit o' supper in the parlour." This "bit of supper" was pleasant occupation for another hour. The two men talked of their lands, of the minerals in the Blackburnfoot, of the almost certainty of minerals in Wellbrae (cousin John's farm), &c.

Evidently cousin John's hope was not so much to make himself, as his outward estate, fair in the lady's eyes.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. SIMONS ESTABLISHES HERSELF.

"Like Alexander, I will reign."

MRS. SIMONS was awaked very early, by the full chorus of praise with which the song-birds ushered in that morning of early June. The warm sunshine, pouring in through the white-blinded window, tempted her to look out. Just under her were the few flower-beds Mary kept in trim, now nodding with shining lilies, glistening white, like angels' robes, in the morning sunbeams. Below, lay the linn, with its rich blended sombre fir and gnarled oaks with golden leaflets not yet unfurled, the blue jay flying over their tops, and the moan of the cushat from their depths.

It was not quite true that for all that was "lovely in nature she had a passion," but she did feel unspeakable satisfaction at her escape from the

"dormitory" of Mrs. Black's establishment, to this sweet chamber. Breakfast was laid downstairs.

"Mary," said Mrs. Hamilton, on Mrs. Simons's entrance, "there's the hen cackling; run and get the eggs."

Mary darted out across the court, and was back in a minute, the eggs nestling in her little apron. Her motions reminded one of what wise men tell us of the motions of light.

Mrs. Simons was sorely puzzled. How or when was she to begin making this rustic Hebe, what her aunts insisted she must be made—"quite a fashionable miss?"

"Mrs. Hamilton," she began, "might I suggest, Miss Hamilton should not herself go to the hen-loft."

"Oh, it's no loft," replied the simple woman. "Just one or two nice clean nests, in the corners o' the byre. Oh, no, I dinna like mysel', women speelin' lethers."

"Still, it is no place for Miss Hamilton."

"I canna be aye kept out the byre," cried Mary, getting very red, determined to make a desperate stand for her rights.

Mrs. Simons looked appallingly dignified.

"Indeed, Miss Hamilton, I must insist that you

give exclusive attention to your studies; you will find them, I assure you, more than sufficient to occupy your time."

When Mrs. Simons went upstairs, she found Mary diligently polishing a chair. She turned and went to seek her mother. Mrs. Hamilton was neither in parlour nor kitchen, so the lady crossed the court, towards a mincing sound she fancied had some connection with her whereabouts. She was right. Mrs. Hamilton was working most heartily, mincing curd for cheese.

"Mrs. Hamilton," began Mrs. Simons, "I must beg that Miss Hamilton shall not do the menial work for the household."

"Mean work! Oh, no! I always made a point o' makin' the lass do that, or I wad do a thing myself. No, no. Mary's just done like the dairy work, or sortin' up the parlour, or that like."

"But," insisted the lady, "she must do so no longer. She must not again dust the parlour, as I find she is doing just now."

The simple woman stared amazed.

"Well, to be sure, if she's to be a leddy—I'll do that myself after this."

There was a pause on both sides, then a voice, like the carol of a bird, came outside the door.

"Oh, mother, the governess is off somewhere, and I'll get mincin' the cheese."

Mary stood opposite her governess, like a convicted criminal.

"I put it to your mother, Miss Hamilton," said that lady, quietly, "does she choose that I leave at once, or that you submit yourself to my rules?"

She looked at Mrs. Hamilton, waiting an answer.

"Oh, certainly; it's but right that Mary should do as you bid her."

"I'll not live long, if I never get puttin' my han' to a thing," cried Mary.

"You will gradually refine in appearance," retorted the lady.

The handsome woman of six-and-thirty might be somewhat jealous of the blooming loveliness of the sixteen-year child. . . .

Lessons went on but slowly, yet gradually progress was made. It was no doubt fortunate that Mary's first attempts were made at home.

Cousin John paid a second visit. So sedulous was he in his attentions, so lost in admiration of Mrs. Simons's performances, vocal and instrumental, that she next day remarked to Mary—

"Your cousin John seems an intelligent person."

One evening he came, bringing a little basket,

filled with the earliest product of his cherry-trees, which offering, he, with lowering watchfulness of eye and brow, shyly proffered to the lady. It was received most graciously, the blue greys looked full up at him, while she said, that to her mind, the first pickings of summer fruits were to the full as suggestive of all tenderer associations with the past, as the earliest flowers of spring.

Cousin John, all flustered with this success, proposed that she, Mrs. Hamilton, and Mary, should come to Wellbrae some day next week, as there would be then "lots of cherries," and "a power o' roses."

CHAPTER VI.

WELLBRAE.

ROS.—I had as lief be wooed of a snail.

ORL.—Of a snail ?

ROS.—Ay, of a snail ; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head. A better jointure, I think, than you can make a woman.—*As You Like it.*

A MIDSUMMER morning, a vapoury sheen lightly veiling its gorgeous beauty. Cousin John appeared, hatchet in hand, as accidentally inspecting a meagre belting of scatterling fir-trees that skirts the Wellbrae avenue. He threw open a white gate, with hearty words of welcome, and enter Mrs. Simons, Mrs. Hamilton, and Mary. The appearance of cousin John was plain, plebeian ; so was the entrance to his place. Shares were down—very flat, indeed, in Mrs. Simons' cogitations. He walked, twirling and plucking in pieces an unfortunate gowan.

“ And how do you get on wi' the grazin' ? ” asked Mrs. Hamilton.

"Oh, first-rate! Aboon forty heid gettin' very heavy."

Mrs. Simons' toes tapped mincingly along: this was very low conversation. But just as her upward eyes reached a certain inclination, they caught a view of the house—a neat white house, sweetly situated. Shares began to fluctuate.

"There's a two-year old just here," went on cousin John, pausing at a gate in the beech-hedge. "I wonder, now, what Mrs. Simons would think o' this two-year old."

The eyes fell to the level of the two-year old, and met a pair of blue greys, not unlike themselves, mildly staring right on, while the handsome ears whisked the flies from the sprouting horns that graced the broad fair front.

"A fine animal; quite a study for a picture, I should say."

"I kent that beast wad please ye," cried cousin John, coming to her side with that obvious admiration, how attractive, alas! to vain woman. "I kent that ane wad please ye. Ane may be aye sure a rale clever woman 'll ken when she sees a beast."

Mrs. Simons smiled very faintly. The subject was too distasteful naturally to be yet quite wholeheartedly approved.

In front of the house was an enclosure within a lofty beech-hedge, filled with solemnly shaped and clipped yew-trees, completely screening the low windows.

"A piece of miserably bad taste," thought Mrs. Simons. Shares were, however, not materially affected. "This could be cleared away."

Cousin John rapped at the door, which was opened by a cross-looking middle-aged woman.

"Quite well, Peggy?" asked good Mrs. Hamilton. "You're always so neat an' nice, Peggy; that door-step's just beautiful."

"No muckle to file that," spurted forth Peggy severely; "the back-door serves us, binna at an occasion bye ord'nar', like the present," eyeing Mrs. Simons with a malignant scowl.

The lady sailed in with stately unconsciousness. Cousin John led the way to the upstairs sitting-room. A plain room, terribly plain. What cared Mrs. Simons? She knew what she could make of such a room, with such a look-out.

"You're pu'in' your currants," said Mrs. Hamilton, perceiving from the window a tremulous motion in divers individuals of a green sea of gooseberry and currant bushes.

"Oh, ay; they're no' that ripe, but we couldna'

keep them. Thae blue jays are most desp'rate in the mornin's ! ”

“ Can't you shoot them ? ” asked Mrs. Simons.

“ It's no' easy dune ; they're sly.”

“ I couldna' touch them, they're that bonny beasts,” cried Mary.

“ Such beautiful birds, I fancy you mean,” said Mrs. Simons.

“ I dare say she's richt na',” thought cousin John to himself ; “ after a', a bird's no' a beast. I wonder what she'll think o' the place ! Maybe ye wad like to step out a bit, Mrs. Simons ? ” continued he, aloud.

“ Nothing could be more delightful. That is, if Mrs. Hamilton feels inclined.”

“ Oh, me ! ” cried the good Mrs. Hamilton. “ I have to see Peggy's dairy, an' they say three's no company.”

This shocking proverb deeply horrified Mrs. Simons ; but having risen from her chair when cousin John proposed the “ stepping-out,” she commanded a view of the large, walled garden, full of all manner of pleasant fruits, and sweet old-world flowers, its shady alleys, and quiet walks. It was a pleasant shelter from the storms and bleak winds, that had blown so roughly in her world. She raised her eyes quietly in Mary's face, and said—

"You'll come, my dear?"

Mary, pleased at heart by the gentle kindliness of look and tone, blurted out, with utmost heartiness, "Oh, I'll do that."

"'With pleasure.' Miss Hamilton, on such occasions say simply, 'With pleasure!'"

"Na' ye ken a' thing," said cousin John, and this time audibly; "ye ken a' thing, an' what's mair, ye hae that nate a way o' wordin' them."

The lady smiled, evidently much gratified, and Mary thought to herself, "If she sees no fault wi' consin John's way o' talkin', can she no' let me alone."

"Now, Mrs. Simons," said cousin John, "first of all, come an' see what ye think o' the situation o' the dairy, wi' regard to the byre. Ye see, I planned this a' mysel'—the short passage an' the double doors between; to have the one opening off the other."

Mrs. Simons forcibly gulped down a little shudder, and said, with a wintry smile, "What a head for contriving you must have, Mr. Hamilton."

"Oh! ye've found out that. Ay, ye'll find I have a heid. My stars! what a foot ye have, Mrs. Simons!" he ran on, emboldened by his success, as she stepped uneasily about on tiptoe, in her nice prunello boots. "Now, Mary, what wad ye gie to have a foot like that?"

“ You gentlemen have all the head—what does a foot signify ? ”

“ I dinna ken. Ye’re the cleverest woman ever I saw, Mrs. Simons.”

Cousin John rubbed his hands, and threw them wildly out from him, walking with many extraordinary gyrations.

“ Ye see we have a great show o’ fruit an’ a power o’ roses ! ”

“ Exquisite ! those roses ! ”

“ Weel, weel, make yourself at home. Use your freedom ; take as many as ever you like.”

“ How much more interest may hang round one such flower, than could be found even in such a garden of delights as this,” said she, thoughtfully.

“ What ! ” said cousin John, bewildered ; “ ye wad like just ane ! Weel, see ye pick a fine ane ! ”

“ If given by a friend one deeply esteems, how such a flower is cherished ! ”

Cousin John stared blankly one moment : the next a strange light twinkled in his eyes. He went headforemost into the nearest rose-bush, scratched his hands, broke his knife, tore off a branch, finally found a rose, and spluttering up to Mrs. Simons, offered it with the watchful scowl of his shaggy eyebrows. The blue greys rested on that

rose, with such a droop of darkest eyelash, such a gently breaking smile over every feature!

Then the little gloved hands undid a sparkling gem that gleamed below the fair throat, and placed the rose there. Cousin John reeled and danced before her, now forwards, now backwards, till they reached the sea of gooseberry bushes.

“Would ye tak’ a few grossets?—that is, gooseberries.”

Mrs. Simons shrank back, and paused determinedly. This person was unpresentable. Yet presentable, to whom did she mean to present him? He would idolize her, and here was peace and rest.

Dear reader, there’s many a one does worse than Mrs. Simons. She stood up resolutely against herself and her shrinkings, and said, smiling, “I will, thank you. I never heard their Scotch name before!”

CHAPTER VII.

STATE OF COUSIN JOHN'S HEART.

"Give her an inch, and she'll take an ell."

Vulgar old Proverb.

THE story of Dido is an old one now, and pretty well forgotten.

Poor lady, her relation, the king of Tyre, murdered her husband to possess himself of his treasures, and she, with some attached followers, fled for her life to the distant city, Utica.

She throws herself at the feet of the king, and begs but one favour: so much land as may be compassed by an ox-hide!

Who can deny such a trifle to soothe her widowed heart? Not long can she survive her Sichæus! She means to erect a monument to him! Her heart is buried in his grave!

Bring forth, ye sons of Utica, bring forth the

hide of an ox, the largest and fairest of the plains of Utica. Give it to the disconsolate one: suffer that she build her pillar of memorial, amid strangers, in a strange land.

But why, O princess? Why, taking the sharp cutting shears, do ye cut the hide in stripes innumerable, and light as the rind of summer fruit?

Behold, ye sons of Utica! behold the land an ox-hide encompasseth! Here shall I build my pillar of memorial; here shall I find a city of rest.

O Dido, Dido, type of womankind! crafty, deceitful, shuffling Dido! By a stratagem pitiful in its weakness, you have secured for yourself a site for a city—would have cost any downright honest man, contests and skirmishes innumerable.

Just so did Mrs. Simons. She asked a rose—one single rose—but that rose she rooted deep in the inmost heart of cousin John, and there, like the rose of the old ballad, "it grew and it grew till it couldn't grow no higher." It cast forth branches on this side and on that, till it shadowed and pervaded every scene, every action of his life.

"Rosy is the north, rosy is the south." The stable, the very byre, were redolent of roses. The delicious pertume pursued him to kitchen and parlour, so that he clutched and scraped in a big china

bowl of old rose-leaves, dried by his late mother, fancying the fragrance came from them.

"These leaves smell just rather strong in the room."

"Thae leaves," laughed Peggy, bitterly; "they're dry enough; near as auld's yoursel'. But they say nae fules like auld fules. For folk at some folk's time o' day to begin caperin' wi' roses, wha could hae thocht it!"

Mrs. Simons had, meantime, other thoughts than memorial monuments to her Sichæus. To fit herself to govern a new city was evidently working in her brain. What was Mary's surprise one morning on finding her governess with her mother in the dairy, sleeves drawn elbow high, and delicate hands bungling with wooden rollers and butter?

"Is that you, Mrs. Simons, making up the butter?"

"For a lady to amuse herself making up pretty shapes of butter, is a very different thing from making the dairy one's chief business, Mary."

After this Mrs. Simons took lessons from Mrs. Hamilton in many different arts. Cousin John went and came, always watchful, always excited, but saying nothing. Love, admiration, or whatever it was, was teaching its sure lesson—humility. Could such

a paragon consent to marry him? His house, his place, how manifold were their deficiencies. The spectre light of the amusement that had shone in the eyes of the minister's daughter came out from its forgotten hiding-place, and ever seemed to gleam before him. He resumed the wretched habit of biting his fingers as he turned over and over again in his mind how he was to broach the subject. He found himself one evening in the precincts of the Blackburnfoot, when this state of mind came over him with more than usual force. First he went forward some steps, then back, and having exercised himself in this way for half an hour, he would doubtless have brought it to a conclusion by taking the road for Wellbrae, had not our friend Alick Paterson brushed gaily across the field to pay a visit in hopes of seeing her, whose image at present filled *his* imagination. He hailed cousin John most cordially, who was right glad to put himself under *his* wing. Alongside of that fine young fellow he felt, as he said, "quite cheery."

But how can their astonishment be described, when, on passing the kitchen window, they saw before them Mrs. Simons enveloped in a huge pinafore, her fine arms displayed to the elbows, deep in the midst of "a bakin'"; while Mary stood by

looking on. How deftly she turned the cake and sprinkled the flour. Cousin John caught every clever turn in one lowering look, while Alick and Mary exchanged a glance of sly merriment. Mrs. Hamilton met her guests with her usual cordiality, and served tea, at which Mrs. Simons' scones formed the principal figure. Cousin John helped himself to one, then another, and another.

"I thought ye couldn't eat scones, cousin John," said Mary.

"Scones! No, no more I can; but these are quite different from any other scones e'er I saw. They're quite extraornar' fine. You have an uncommon taylent at them, Mrs. Simons."

"Oh, she has that!" cried Mrs. Hamilton, enthusiastically; "a perfect taylent for anything she tries. And that butter," said she, handing him a little plate, "did you ever see prettier made-up butter?"

Cousin John took the little plate in his great hand, exclaiming,—

"Most extraornar'! It's raly most extraornar'!" said he, deliberately turning it round and round.

"Don't you think, cousin, Mrs. Simons would just make a most excellent conductor of a farm?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, not meaning to say anything very particular.

Cousin John blushed and blurted out,—

“It would be an uncommon lucky farm that got her; but I reckon she wad never demean hersel’ as far.”

Mrs. Simons made a desperate effort, rallied the blue greys, and prevailed on them to seek the roof.

“Since I have seen this sweet country life, I loathe the idea of returning to a city!”

“Do ye so!” cried cousin John, springing half off his chair, and sitting down again. “I’m glad to hear ’t; right glad to hear ’t.”

“This is a beautiful country,” said Mrs. Simons, resolutely turning the blue greys on Alick; “and a very sweet part of it is Mr. Hamilton’s little place, Wellbrae.”

“I think sae, I think sae!” cried cousin John, with another quick spring. “But it’s no’ that very sma’ a place, Mrs. Simons. Anything ye wad like done; that is, anything ye might think wad be an improvement?”

“Well, really, Mr. Hamilton, your taste is so good. I think it is very faultless, except, perhaps, I can’t say I like the enclosure just in front.”

“Eh, what! the fine clippit trees? The trees an’ beech-hedge, that’s ta’en a’ this time an’ care? Ye canna mean thae?”

"Indeed I do," said Mrs. Simons, firmly. "I consider it in very bad taste so to block up the front of a house, especially with such a noble lawn as yours in front."

"Thae beautiful clippit trees!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton. "Do ye raly mean thae?"

"Na, na, that can never be!" cried cousin John, impatiently, and shortly afterwards departed in very bad humour.

If cousin John, on his way home, thought himself as far as ever from his object, not so the lady. She meant to be Mrs. Hamilton, of Wellbrae, but she was determined to get rid of that ugly enclosure. For three whole days she saw or heard nothing of cousin John, who passed the following day and the next again in high, indignant admiration of his beech-hedge and clippit trees.

He vowed again and again,—“No woman ’ll ever darken my doors, that doesna’ like clippit trees!”

The sharp-witted Nelly was mistress of all the bearings of the case in no time.

He employed the forenoons of both these days clipping and dressing these wonders of nature and art with the hedge-scissors. “The scent of the roses” did not “hang round him still,” and Mrs. Simons’

image, ever before his eyes, hurtled fitfully through clouds of indignation and wrath.

But, on the third morning, what was Nelly's astonishment on being awaked very early by the sound of a hatchet, and looking from the window to see the sole survivor of the "clippit trees" nodding in time to the strokes of the hatchet, lustily wielded by cousin John! Having cleared the slain from the field, he contemplated his work with much satisfaction, declaring she was "richt in that as in a thing," and he would have the hedge holed out that very day.

"I suppose the hoose gangs next," snarled Nelly, as she flung, rather than set, the teapot on the table.

That very evening found cousin John at the Blackburnfoot. Going upstairs unannounced, he was so fortunate as to find Mrs. Simons alone.

"Weel it's dune," cried he, bouncing in; "it's a' as plain's my hand," holding out a palm more remarkable for roughness than the reverse. "An' noo will ye just ——"

But why proceed? All recitals of such scenes are utterly vapid, from Strephon, throwing himself on his knees, to the plain man in the ballad, saying, "Lass, if ye loe me, tell me noo."

Very quietly and sensibly did Mrs. Simons that

evening announce her future prospects to Mrs. Hamilton.

Very much disgusted were the aunts when they heard that a woman of Mrs. Simons' stylish appearance had consented to marry John Hamilton.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AFTERNOON VISIT.

"As blythe and as artless as the lambs on the lea,
And dear to my heart as the light to the e'e,
But oh ! she's an heiress——"

BURNS.

THE wedding at Blackburnfoot went off pleasantly, save for some snarling between aunt Jane and the mistress of Stanecroft. Aunt Jane was not included in an invitation to a tea-drinking at Stanecroft, in honour of the bride's home-coming.

She desired that Mary's dress should surprise the Stanecroft girls, and lay claim to a rank higher than theirs. In this she had a powerful ally in the mother, who was anxious to show off her finery.

"It's no like me," said Mary, sorrowfully contemplating her image, arrayed in a fancifully-fashioned robe of green silk. "They'll scarcely think it's me, and I'll not can do a thing for takin' care o' my dress."

They set out to walk round the road, for the dress was pronounced too fine to go through the glen.

Coming—where, on the one hand, the way was deeply shadowed by monster plane-trees, and on the other, the last resting-place of the lairds “glimmed” through a dim, ragged plantin’,—coming here, the song of a trotting burnie, the murmur of the heavy leafage, set our little Mary to “fight with shadows,” as such young things so often do.

“Father, if I die at the boarding-school, which I wouldn’t wonder—will you promise me—will you be sure to bury me here?”

“Most certainly, Mary,”—her speech did not strike on him as startling, for his right of burial with his fathers was the thought just then uppermost in his mind,—“most certainly, Mary, I have full right to bury ——”

“Preserve us!” cried the mother. “Hold your peace, good man, you set me shiverin’.”

Blackburnfoot stood still.

“No, Mary; it’s you that must bury me. And see that I’m put inside, as the lairds of the Blackburnfoot have a right to be. No outside lair for me, mind ye. George would make no words of that.”

Coming, where through the hedge they caught

glimpses of pink short gowns and buff caps, snatches of merry songs, and light tones of gladsome voices, Mary stood lost in delight.

"They're innin'," she said, with a great sigh. "How I wish I was goin' down to them, wi' their scones and milk."

"The lassie's in a creel," said her mother, impatiently. "I'm thinkin', if Leezie White or Aggie Smith gets a glimpse o' you, gaun along the road mair elegantly drest than they're ever like to be if they were out on their kirkin' Sabbath, they'll be thinkin' who's to be envied!"

The hollow road lay in shadow, but the afternoon sun shimmered bright on the restless leaves of the tall aspens in the hedge-row, and glanced along the fields where the reapers were packing the corn-sheaves on carts, to be conveyed to the stack-yard, and this Mary called "innin'."

George now appeared in the field, leading a great horse in a long cart.

"Innin' already, George!" shouted Blackburnfoot; "you're very well on, and splendid oats, I think."

"Wonderfully heavy," answered George, bringing his mighty beast to a stand. "It would be worth your while to come and see."

Blackburnfoot scrambled up the bank, Mary after him. George ran to give her his hand.

"You needn't leave your horse, George," said she.

Yet it was the first pleasurable sensation connected she fancied with her fine clothes. George thought her worth the leaving his horse, to run to help her up the bank.

"Oh, Mary, with that dress!" cried the mother.

"There's no fear of the dress; mother, it's all dry and clean up here."

"Well, but dinna' ye be long, Mary," cried the mother, the fear of aunt Jane before her eyes.

The mother passed on, under the great beech-trees that shadowed the long barn. The upper halves of the cross-doors standing open showed busy workers passing from barn to stack-yard, bending under shaking loads of golden grain. Floating through her mind came the words, "Like a shock of corn fully ripe." Then they somehow associated themselves with her own good man, with his ruddy cheek and warm blue eye. Shaking her head impatiently to get rid of the ugly unlucky feeling, she turned into the little village of Stanecroft.

George was going to gather up some sheaves that had been overlooked in an off-lying corner of the great field.

The cart went lightly over the white stubble land. On a bright harvest day, as we stand in some quiet nook, with far-off shouts, dim laughter, and the soft singing of young girls, coming blended together, how gladsome is the ring of these carts going everywhere up and down the fields. Some heavy with the children's bread, others ringing light, empty only to be filled. The ring of the wheels set Mary's very heart dancing.

"Has there been any preacher here since Mr. Smith?" asked Blackburnfoot, as they passed a great beech, that standing withdrawn from this end of the village afforded a summer pulpit under the splendid canopy of its branches.

"I've often wondered how they can preach here," said Mary. "I'm sure I never hearkened much. There's such a prospect all round."

"Ye may say that," said her father, turning his back on the tree, and gazing dreamily down the field to its boundary line, close set with sycamores, whose dripping branches dwarfed the unripened corn, and tempted utilitarian husbandmen to cut them down, as cumberers of the ground. To the left lay the peaked blue roof of the laird's last home, screened round and round by the same giant brotherhood of sycamore and ash trees. But from the

elevation of the preacher's beech the eye cleared the tops of the sycamores, and passing over sweet homes and goodly farm-steadings, rested on the town of Boniton, lying hazily in the valley, with the palace of its Dukes shining white in its dark woods, then rose to the circle of hill country beyond, stretching round and round like a vast panorama.

But Blackburnfoot's eye did not rise. It rested earnestly on the white palace of the Dukes.

"I've done sorely wrong to make a coal-pit in the lands," groaned Blackburnfoot, leaning on his staff, like a man smitten by some sudden shock.

"What makes you say so now?" asked young Stanecroft.

"I never thought on it before, but do you suppose His Grace can ever stand a long chimney spewing out smoke up here, in sight, ye may say, of his very palace windows?"

"What can he do to prevent it?" asked George.

"Do!" exclaimed Blackburnfoot, scornfully; "they can do anything, just anything they like."

"I can't see that," persisted George; "of course the laws would protect you?"

"Laws! They care for laws! I tell you they'll

drive me out o' house an' ha', clap me up in gaol like poor Laird Somera."

"Oh, father," cried Mary, aghast, "they could never do that!"

"Well, well, we'll see," said her father, drawing himself up, as if he felt he had drawn somewhat too strongly on the pictorial for the tastes of the nineteenth century.

The forgotten sheaves stood in a quiet nook overlooking the deep ravine of a rocky linn. The afternoon moon hung her silver horn over the birken braes, among which the robin sang with a gentle sadness as every instant some little yellow leaf parted from its twig, floated softly down, and fell on the grass white with rimy drops.

Mary threw herself on a stack of corn-sheaves, as if she had met some dear friend after a long enforced absence. Taking a sheaf in her arms, she carried it to the cart, her face looking over it like a pale wild rose.

"Oh, stop—your dress! You'll spoil your dress, much better not to touch it."

George showed so much of the steady disapproval of a man for all tawdry wastefulness, that little Mary shrank, feeling he was cold and changed to her. She turned, and stood looking down the birken braes.

What was it set George's thoughts busy on the old story of Ruth? Sure, he was no Boaz. He was whole four-and-twenty, while Mary was scarce sixteen. He felt like a Boaz to his Ruth. Could he have seen on the other side of the little straw bonnet, he would have found that Mary,—

"Her blue eyes, with tears o'erflowing,
Stood like Ruth amid the golden corn."

For Mary could ill brook that her friend George should disapprove of any one act of hers.

Her father's voice called "Mary!" She turned, and found that they and the cart were already crossing the field. It troubled her again, George should have set out without speaking to her. Then she remembered aunt Jane's offensive speeches. No wonder his pride was hurt.

"But surely he can't think I'm like aunt Jane? Yet why not? Dressed up like a gowk, as if I had nothing else to think of but to be fine enough."

And she went quickly across the field, eager to find something to do, that she might show George how little she was like aunt Jane.

She turned into the village street, through the white wicket to the farmhouse, with its trim holly hedges, its long low front decked with monthly

roses, contrasting faintly with the scarlet berries of the rowan-trees.

In the house she was seized upon by Betsy and Eelin. The green silk gown, as aunt Jane had intended, roused all their woman love of finery. At last Mary broke from them, and doubling up the skirt, secured it with a pin, putting on over it a great baking pinafore of Miss Betsy's, which fortunately met her eye.

"There, I've got rid of that hateful dress," she said, with a big sigh of relief.

Then exchanging her bonnet for a nicely starched muslin cap that lay within reach, she hastened past Betsy and Eelin, and into the village street.

Her object was to be allowed to draw the water for George's horses. Don't be shocked, reader, with my poor little sixteen-year heiress. This village street was as quiet as your own villa garden, and George was her life-long friend.

Presently he appeared, leading Blackie and Brownie.

"Let me draw the water, do, George," cried Mary, eagerly.

"Well, if you have a mind," answered George, smiling on her as he used to do.

The little hands, after four months' idleness,

looked too soft and fair to grasp the great rusty chain to which the buckets were suspended.

"Oh, stop, stop, Mary, let me!" and he took the chain from her hold.

"You don't think I can't so much as draw a pail o' water, George?" asked Mary, the tears rising in her eyes.

"You're best not, there's no need of your doing such things now; you're much best not."

Somehow he did not now like to see her do things that seemed quite natural before.

Mary patted Blackie's shining shoulder, as he snuffed up the water at one eager draught.

"Here, Blackie, here," and she offered an apple she had picked as she came down the gravel walk.

Blackie put back his ears and curled up his lip, showing rows of shining teeth ready to take the apple.

"Oh, George!" cried Mary, drawing away her hand.

"You haven't lost your way wi' beasts, Mary?" asked George, taking the apple from her and holding it to the shining teeth. "Anyway, you haven't lost your mindfulness for them."

George had not vanity enough to think, "Love me, love my dog."

"What new frolic is this, Mary?" said a voice close to them.

Mary started.

"Oh, Mrs. Hamilton! I'm so glad to see you." For it was the bride and cousin John.

* * * * *

Tea-drinking was begun shortly after six o'clock, though Miss Betsy evidently wished to have it delayed, for the mistress was heard to say,—“No, Betsy, I can wait no longer.”

Tea was just over, when the door was thrown open, and there entered a divinity student of dissenting persuasion. Miss Betsy hastened to set tea before him, with many apologies for their not having awaited his coming.

“Don't mention it, don't mention it, but it's a good piece of a walk from Boniton.”

“Will you not take a bit more of the bread yourself, Betsy?” asked a tall, florid young man, timidly offering the cake which Betsy had set down.

“More of the cake!” replied Betsy, smartly. “No, thank you, Mr. Forrest.”

Poor young Forrest could get no look, for Betsy watching when the man of letters would be ready for another cup.

"Well, Mr. John, and what did you think of Edinburgh?" asked the old laird.

Cousin John was sorely annoyed to be addressed before his stylish wife, by the laird, the head of his house, as "Mr. John." The title "Wellbrae" so distinctly belonged to him, and was so manifestly becoming to his years.

"Mr. Reid asked me that the other day. 'Wellbrae,' says he to me, 'and what did you think of Edinburgh, Wellbrae?' and I told him I just thoct nothing o' 't."

"Ah!" cried Miss Betsy, "I'm sure Princes Street's a lovely thing! I fancy the Edinburgh people have a very fine style with them?" she continued, addressing the student deferentially.

"Well, there can be no doubt that the city life opens up the mind and polishes up the manners—in short gives a style," said the student, snorting, and 'backing' his chair a pace or two.

Cousin John curled up his arms on the back of his chair, and resting his chin on them, chimed in,—

"What's a man without a style! Naething at a'. How long is't since ye were in Edinburgh, Stancroft?"

"We stayed there, as you know, ten days in the

year '91, when my father beat the Duke in the Court of Session."

The laird spoke of it as of the most memorable stay in the most celebrated city in the world's history.

"And how did you like it, the time ye were in't?" continued cousin John.

"Exceedingly. The advocates are the most gentlemanly men in the world, sir. Our agents were most polite and respectful to my father and me. Our chief counsel gave us a dinner at his house fit for a Duke. They treated us, sir, with the most marked respect," repeated the old man, drawing himself to the full height of his fine figure, his eye kindling with proud remembrance.

Cousin John shrank together, under a sense of inferiority.

"Oh, well! I had no such luck; and I wearied my life out the eight days I was there."

"I look on it as a proper thing, sir, for a man to see the capital city of his country," persisted the laird. "I sent my son there for a week, two years since, just to let him see it."

"And how did ye like it, George? Not much, I wad think. What did you think o' the Parliament House, an' a set o' idle fellows walk—walkin' up an'

down, in wigs an' gowns, talk—talkin' about naething at a'?"

"It's a fine sight," said the student, "to see so many men who thoroughly understand the law."

"What's fine about it?" cried cousin John, sharply. "I see nothing fine about it. A parcel o' fellows to be able to tell ye something o' their own business, when they've been at it a' their days. Wad ye see anything fine in my being able to tell you how to crop your land?"

Mr. Bryson smiled contemptuously, and said—

"The cases are somewhat different: the exercise of mind, of brain, of learning, is always a superior spectacle."

"I see nothing superior about them," cried cousin John, with increasing heat. "A set o' lounging, idle fellows."

A lurking suspicion that his wife had an admiration of the learned professions, rather than of farming, gave him bitterness on the subject.

"The advocates are the most gentlemanly men in the world, sir," said the laird, drawing himself up authoritatively. "When I was in Edinburgh with my father, in the beginning of '91, they——"

" Oh, I daresay, I daresay," interposed cousin John, hastily, trying to ward off the long recital, by which he had been kept in an under position all his life. " I'm no' sayin' but they're a' that; but it's no great thanks to a man to know something o' his own business. It's no to call a fine thing."

" When a business requires so much natural talent, such profound study and research, as to be an eminent lawyer does, perhaps there may be said to be something fine in it," said Mrs. John Hamilton, with her most conciliatory smile.

" Weel, weel, if ye say 't it's no doubt richt; but for my pairt I think a proper management o' beasts an' land needs as mony brains an' as great a study's anything I see."

Cousin John sank into silence; but presently plucked nervously at Miss Eelin's dress, and signalling oddly with his head towards the corner where sat Mrs. John, remarked,—

" There's a woman for ye! She can talk on ony subject."

Poor man! he felt uneasy at times under the feeling that his very superior wife couldn't help looking down on his thoughts and ways, and from such feelings he took refuge in more and more applauding and admiring her superiority.

"Ye'll see there's no great wonder if a man has to gie in to a woman like that, now and then."

"Well, I fancy she's very well learned, and knows a great deal," said simple Eelin.

"My stars! ye wad see that!" exclaimed cousin John; and he rubbed his hands, got up, and betook himself to walking round her, taking "different pints o' view" of this admirable woman as she sat talking to Mary.

"I might, perhaps, have been an advocate," said George, suddenly.

"Well, it was no person's doing but your own, George," replied the mistress. "You got a splendid edication, nobody can deny that. You took to the farmin' o' your own mind."

"At sixteen we can hardly know what's best," said her son.

"I canna see what ye wad be at!" broke in cousin John. "Havena ye sattin' down on your ain lands? Havena ye your ain beasts to see to? What wad ye be at? Folk maun do something for their bread."

"I make mine by the work of my hands," said George, proudly. "But it's a noble thing for a man to make a fortune by the wisdom and learning of mind and head."

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE HAMILTON.

"A shepherd all thy life, but yet king-born."

A TRUE Eutopia did the harvest moon make of the little village of Stanecroft. She whitened the low thatched roofs—they sheltered the soft sleep of innocence. She struck on the great well—for such a well did Abraham covenant with Abimelech with seven ewe lambs. She glinted over the leaves of the old walnut-tree—they whispered quiet and holy; such whispers Eve heard in Paradise.

The stillness was broken by many voices, coming from the farmhouse. The Hamiltons took one road, the student and young Forrest accompanied the Blackburnfoot family and George for a little way, then came good-byes, and George and Mary were on the moonlight road alone, her father and mother going before.

a good work. And who can be said to *furnish* the room, if it's not the farmer?"

"That's what I telt ye lang syne," broke in cousin John; "I telt ye mony a time, he wad never be fit for a thing but the books. The mair fules ye to send him to the college!"

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"What a pleasure to be done wi' their talkin' and laughin'," said Mary, gazing up at the ever-shifting leaves of the aspens in the hedgerow. "It was here the witch's house stood, George."

"Poor old Jenny's house," replied George, absently.

"Oh, George, it was eerie. In the afternoons I durstna' pass't till ye came home, and then ye led me safe past it. D'ye mind, George?"

Poor George "minded" but too well.

"I aye think it's eerie yet," said Mary, coming closer to him.

George smiled and drew her arm through his, and glad to try rational conversation, as a guard against his thoughts and feelings uppermost, said,—

"That's the mischief of hearing foolish things when we're children, Mary; we can't get rid of them."

"George," said Mary, after a minute's thought, "you seem all for learning now. I knew well ye were fond o' books, I didn't know ye thought so little o' our dear old ways!"

"Think little of our dear old ways!" ejaculated George, and stood still a moment, then set off walking faster and was silent.

"Why are you set against being a farmer?"

"Because farming—because—oh, Mary, if I *had*—I might have—" and he broke off.

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"Because farming—because—oh, Mary, if I had—I might have—" and he broke off.

"You think I should learn all I can?" said Mary, looking up at him with reverent eyes.

"Certainly. You're so young, you're raised to such wealth! You might almost be made fit for any station. It's only justice, only justice."

Poor George spoke heavily, but Mary failed to understand him.

"What must I do first, George?" she asked, anxious only to please him.

"First, Mary, I advise—but you won't be vexed?"

"Vexed? No, George. What first?"

"Mary, you must give up your Scotch. It's so pretty, I like it so much! I'm very sorry, but it would hurt you at school at once. You must try to give it up."

"Oh, I'm a rale bad speaker, I know," cried poor little Mary; "but I didn't think, George, ye had been so ill at it," she said, her lip quivering with vexation, half thinking, half pretending to think, that George thought she spoke very badly.

George looked down at the quivering lip and tearful eyes. Taking his arm from hers, he took the other side of the way, and whistled in time to a sharp lively walk.

Poor George! what a struggle it was not to catch the vexed girl to his heart, and pour out as much

heartfelt nonsense as to the perfect beauty of her lightest tone, as ever young girl could have desired to hear! Three months before he might have done so, now she was an heiress, not sixteen, her friends watching and guarding her against him. Too proud a man was George to take advantage of the liking she had for him to steal the love of so young a girl against the wishes of her parents.

"Oh, if she had been over twenty, and she's not out sixteen," he thought to himself, and whistled unconsciously.

Mary walked in silence, keeping step to the quick light measure, then said,—

"Do ye like that tune, George? I like it, for it's the very first tune I could sing. A lass we had sang't to me when I was a wee, wee thing. We sang't, an' skipp'd on the floor to't, like daft things."

Mary's father and mother had been hid from sight by the high hedges, but now a sudden turn showed them but a little way before, climbing the upland road to the Blackburnfoot.

"What's he whistlin' that for?" said Blackburnfoot, a smile lurking about his mouth, for if he had ever thought of a husband for Mary, George Hamilton was his thought.

"I should know't," said the mother, "and yet I can't just put a name on't."

"I warrant he knows what he's whistlin', the rascal!" and Blackburnfoot broke into singing, jocosely jogging his wife's arm to the rough trotting time,

" And hey ! for ane an' twenty, Tam,
And ho ! for ane an' twenty, Tam,
I'll learn my kin a rattlin' sang,
Gin I saw ane an' twenty, Tam."

"Preserve us! The good man's in a creel!" cried the good woman, delighted. "But what's he singin' that for?" and she stood still till they came up.

George's quick jealousy understood this action of the mother. It hurt his pride again that they should now watch their daughter with him.

He bade them good-night. Mary left for school without his having gone to see her.

* * * * *

One bright March day, when the "lift" rang with the song of the lark, Mary had been helping George to sow his garden seeds in some of the innumerable ways she knew how. Then they sat on a heap of new-made stobs, the scent of the red

land and the budding birch coming with the wind and the sunshine. George made her sing—

‘Gloomy winter’s noo awa’.

Then he read to her. It was far in the afternoon when they parted. Then came his mother. He should be more careful. Mary was no match for him. She was getting almost a young woman. He should be more careful.

Poor woman! she called forth such a storm of rage, of almost contempt! She had never dared it again. It was an enlightenment to her on that subject, once for all.

Then had come Mary’s splendid fortune, and her son made to feel himself kept at a distance. How her pride chafed under it!

Learning had been no ambition of hers for her son, though from infancy he had shown the readiest talents. Her little George had been annually the admiration and the theme of ministers and heritors at the examination of Boniton Grammar School.

The rows of grinning, sunburnt laddies whispered audibly,—

“Man! ye need never ha’ sattin’ down,” as the little fellow rose again and again, with modest eyes and blushing cheeks, in answer to the minister’s kindly, “First prize—George Hamilton, again!”

He was just twelve years old when his good aunt Grace invited him to spend the winter in the city with her, and to go to college. Rather than that such shining abilities should not have justice done them, she would herself pay half his college fees, besides presenting him with his college gown, which gown she was constrained curiously to tuck, for it trailed behind our little student like an imperial robe. In this way he attended college four sessions, making almost as good an appearance as he had made at Boniton Grammar School, though his under average age in all the classes was against him.

At the end of his fourth session, when he was scarce sixteen, he returned to Stanecroft, bringing his good friend aunt Grace with him, in very precarious health. She died there that autumn.

George was now sixteen, tall and strong. Aunt Grace was dead, and her city lodging had passed into other hands. His father and mother, and his friend Blackburnfoot, took it for granted that he was to settle down on Stanecroft as the future laird, as his forefathers had done for many generations. Besides, his inherent love of a country life was as strong as could be.

So at sixteen George Hamilton crushed all more

ambitious aspirations, his love of learning, and set himself to be his mother's right-hand man on the farm of Stanecroft. The eldest son of the house of Stanecroft had so done from generation to generation for two hundred and fifty years. It did not occur to any one of them that there could be any possible life better.

Mary's sudden rise of fortune, her city aunts' ambitious views, startled poor George from his peaceful shepherd life. She was an heiress, to be educated, and trained, and polished, and he was a ploughman! A somewhat cultivated and idealized ploughman certainly, still labouring at such calling with these very hands, and with no power to take up any calling more generally accepted.

He was so proud and uncomfortable under it, he made no visit to take leave of her before going to school.

Poor George!

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

“Oh ! wha wad leave this humble state
For a’ the pride of a’ the great.”

Bessy at her spinnin’ wheel.

MARY’s success at school was wonderful. Her beauty, her sweet simplicity, made her many friends. One in particular, an orphan girl, a pet among a large circle of connexions—people of the best standing in town.

Christmas was coming, and Mary longed with all her heart for the holidays. Her friend Miss Melville had an urgent request that she should spend the holidays with her relations, the Dunlops of Elmton. Mary rejected the proposal at once ; she must go home.

Not so thought aunt Jane. That lady having heard from Mrs. Bright of Mary’s genteel invita-

tion, insisted that it must be accepted at every sacrifice. "Who knew what depended on it?" And her look was intolerably suggestive, even to the guileless Mary. Besides, it was so desirable to break off old memories, and "time did such wonders in that way."

Mary wrote to her father,—

"DEAR FATHER,

"CHRISTMAS is coming, and you may look out for me too. I can't do a thing the two last days for thinking on it. Mind you come to meet me with the cart and the grey beast. I will be sure to be the day before Christmas. We'll give Jolly, and Charlie, and the cows a treat of a breakfast on New Year's Morning! Aunt Jane won't be there, and I don't care if she was. Hoping to see you and my mother in good health,

"I am your loving daughter,

"MARY HAMILTON."

This letter was brought to the Blackburnfoot, along with one from Miss Jane Burns, to Mrs. Hamilton, written a full day after.

Mary's letter was first read. Her father sat looking into the fire, a quiet smile playing in his

eyes as he pictured to himself Mary giving the horses and cows their New Year's breakfast once more.

"The boarding-school hasna' put that out o' her, an' now, good wife, we'll see what your sister's sayin' to't."

He opened the letter, and read as follows :—

"DEAR SISTER,

"UNDERSTANDING that Mary has wrote to her father that she will be up at the Christmas, I write a few lines to say that it's just quite impossible. Her great friend Miss Melville, who, I have found out, belongs to the most stylish people in town, is quite determined on getting her to spend the holidays with her at Mrs. Dunlop of Elinton's country seat. Mrs. Dunlop actually called herself at Mrs. Bright's to ask her.

"I know I needn't try ever to make you or her father understand what a wonderful piece of luck it is—just actually unbelievable. But, at any rate, you must be content not to see Mary at this time. Her father will have to write to her, and tell her you don't expect her, or she will feel as if she must go home.

"If Mary behaves herself proper, I may say

her fortune's made. She is the luckiest girl ever I heard of. I will see to her clothes and things myself.

"Your affectionate sister,

"JANE BURNS."

The father read with a sore heart and a crushed hope in his breast. But the cruellest cut of all was his Mary feeling as if she *must* come, fain to get away among strange folk, and leave him. He sat looking gloomily in the fire, then saying—

"She lies! the false hizzie; the lassie's heart's a' in comin' home." He flung the letter on the fire, and, taking the heavy poker, held it there till not a fragment of the ashes remained. "I write her I don't expect her! I'll write her my heart's sore to see her."

"Well, goodman, I don't know," said the mother.

She too was looking in the fire. She saw there, as by a magician's wand, a stately mansion and smooth-shaven lawn. A beautiful lady in sweet muslins and laces was strolling there, a parasol over her pretty head. Little children, all dressed in white, frisking round her, gathering lapfuls of golden cowslips. Then a stylish-looking carriage

and pair dashed up to the door, and "a most gentlemanly, stylish-looking young fellow" sprang out of it, and went to meet Mary and his children.

All this vision had to do with the fine-sounding name, "Elmton;" her Mary pressed to go to "Elmton," and "her fortune made, if she only knew how to behave herself proper." True, in this day-dream, she did not as yet see any possible arm-chair, where she or the goodman would feel quite at ease. But with Mary as the centre of the picture, there must be some such nook, and, whether or no, the poor woman's proud mother-love was fain to be content with a wretched, Balaam-share of blessedness. "I shall see it, but not nigh." The father might have turned away, complaining that he had no comfortable, homely daughter, that his grandchildren were too fine for his familiar 'dawting' and dandling, but to the mother, what a consolation it would have afforded, that her Mary was "quite the grand leddy," and her grandchildren "all dressed in white," even though she herself might scarcely touch them. So now she said with a far-off, dreamy look,—

"Well, goodman, I don' know. If it's to be for her good, we shouldna' be selfish."

"For *her* good!" flared her goodman; "the world, the flesh, and the devil! You women are all alike, every ane o' ye, and what for should I hope that *she'll* be different? For her good! To part her frae her puir auld father, wi' his ae fit in the grave, an' never let him see her face, all to run after, God knows what."

He leaned back in his arm-chair solemnly, his anger all spent by this unusual burst of passion, His wife, quite quelled, said—

"Well, well, goodman, I'm no' saying anything. I'm sure I'm as fain's to see her's yoursel', but my sister seems set on't."

"That woman's enough to turn the heids o' any score o' women," said Blackburnfoot, bitterly; "and I wonder to see you so led by her."

"Me led by her!" echoed his wife. "When did I ever side up wi' her? Have I no' aye ta'en your part in a' thing, goodman?"

"You're a good lass, if ever there was ane," said Blackburnfoot, repentantly. "But I'll write to Mary this minute."

This letter expressed very vividly the father's longing for his child's coming, and hinted at several little arrangements by which he hoped greatly to please her. But country folks don't begin and

finish letters, at one sitting. Two pages having been successfully filled, the letter was put away to be finished to-morrow. How the flickering, wavering, worldly wisdom of his wife influenced him, is hard to say, but the last pages, written next day, gave free leave to Mary to go with her friend to Elinton, if it would make her happy, and if her governess thought it advisable. Still, to the quick eye of affection, the deep disappointment underlying the permission was but too evident. Mary came from reading her father's letter, with a very brilliant rainbow round her eyes.

"Well, what does your father say, Mary?" asked Mrs. Bright.

Mary put the letter in her hands, and burst out sobbing and crying. The kind woman seriously alarmed, opened and read the letter.

"What ails you, my dear? I see nothing here to make you cry so."

"It's my father," sobbed Mary; "he's wearying his heart out without me goin' about. I knew he would. It was ill done o' me to leave him! An' he's so mindful and so kind." Here the crying went off in a sort of inarticulate screech. "He would make me free to go where I like, for all that, if it would pleasure me."

"But, having got his permission, you'll go to Elmton?"

"To Elmton!" exclaimed Mary. "To Elmton! and my father wearying for me that way? Oh, Mrs. Bright! how can you?"

Mary broke off from inability to express herself, and Mrs. Bright had too much conscience to urge the point further. Not so, aunt Jane: she arrived that evening to see a hat and feathers on Mary, she had got made up, "just the thing for a young miss's country wear."

"Well, what's your father saying?" she asked.

"You can read his letter."

"Well, he's acted more sensible than I could have expected. But what ideas!" and she read aloud:—"Also I have planned a new pig-house, which is far more convenient than the last. I am wearying to let you see it. Also I have fallen upon a new plan of wintering the young beasts, which is a great deal better both for the poor things themselves, and costs far less trouble. I'm wearying my very life out to see what you'll say to it all." "Such ideas! a pig-house and young beasts. As if you could take any interest in those sort of things now!"

"What for would I not take an interest?" burst

out Mary, hotly, for she had screwed herself up to the point of open war if needful. "I like both pig-houses and young beasts, and if I didn't, I take an interest in everything my father does, and I'm determined to go home."

"Go home you never shall at present. I have a letter from your mother, giving the strictest commands that you are to go to Elmton. Both she and your father are quite delighted that you should have such an offer. The invitation's been formally accepted, and it's just simply impossible in all ediqued, that you shouldn't go. Don't behave like a fool. I have full orders from your mother to manage everything for you in this affair. It's just rather too unbelievable that you've ever got the chance, and you ought to thank me most gratefully for having taken such pains to put you in the way of it, instead of behaving like that."

Mary was cowed by the uncompromising determination of her manner, and hurt and offended at the idea of her mother being so glad to send her off in this way, and giving the management of her to aunt Jane, so she began to cry afresh, and not another word could aunt Jane get out of her. To Mrs. Bright, aunt Jane repeated the assertion, that Mary's parents were most anxious that she should

go to Elmdon, that her mother had written, giving her full authority to send her; and that she, Mrs. Bright, must strictly forbid her to say anything to Miss Melville, as if she didn't wish to go.

She drove off; Mrs. Bright ascended to Mary's chamber where she found her sitting over the fire, sobbing and crying softly, having "taken the pet" very completely at aunt Jane's representation of her mother's letter. Mrs. Bright lectured her gravely on the folly of her conduct, that it was her duty to comply with her parents' wishes and go to Elmdon, that the pleasure of going home would only be enhanced another time by having done her duty in exercising self-denial and not going at this time.

"And then, my dear, think how by mixing with the best society, and seeing a great deal, you will improve yourself, and please your dear parents when they do see you."

Mary raised her tear-soiled countenance, and looked at her with a most pathetic fixedness several times during this exhortation, but offered no word. Mrs. Bright stroked her hair kindly, and called her a little simpleton. She strictly forbade her to say to Miss Melville how grieved she was, as it would be exceedingly ill-bred, and advising her to get to bed, left the room.

Mary lay awake tossing and sighing long after Miss Melville had gone to sleep, after in vain trying to find out what vexed her so much. She came to a resolve in the night watches.

"She said what wasn't true about my mother, or she would have showed me the letter, and my father must and shall have me at home this Christmas."

Breakfast was over at half-past eight. The coach for Boniton, distant only two long miles from the Blackburnfoot, left town she knew at ten o'clock, but where the coach-office was she did not know. However, the hour suited her. Regular classes did not begin till ten o'clock, and she might not be missed till she was fairly on the way. It was a thing she shrank from, yet rather than so disappoint her father she would run away. She didn't fear his being angry. She scribbled a hasty line, saying she was off by the coach for Boniton, put it on her mirror, threw on bonnet and shawl, slipped downstairs and ran for it, looking behind her every moment, expecting somebody in hot pursuit. Her destination was a cab-stand not far off. It was her one hope.

"Do you know where the coach for Boniton starts from?" she asked of the man beside the first

cab. The man touched his hat, and held open the door of his cab inviting her to get in.

Mary couldn't believe her luck when she was set down beside the veritable coach, with the familiar name on it, all for the insignificant charge of eighteen-pence. But then the horses were not put to. She was full half an hour too early, and meantime Mrs. Bright and aunt Jane would come.

But, O joy! the weary half hour was gone. She was rattling along for Boniton, which she knew she would reach in one short hour.

Not till the coach was just leaving was Mary's flight discovered. Mrs. Bright instantly sent the little note she had left to aunt Jane, who, never at fault, just happened to know of 'a gentleman' who intended to drive to that neighbourhood that forenoon, and instantly went and applied for a place in his dog-cart. Poor Mary hadn't been off more than an hour till aunt Jane was in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XL.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

“There came and look’d him in the face
An angel beautiful and bright;
And he knew it was a fiend,
This miserable Knight ! ”

COLERIDGE.

BLACKBURNFOOT had had a letter that morning that put him in sore dismay. It was from his next neighbour, Thomas Gilbert, a tenant in a farm of the Duke’s. It complained bitterly of the complete destruction of the black burn by the new coal-works; how the water for his cattle was destroyed, and many other grievances. It concluded by saying, that if the works were not quickly discontinued, he knew how to get his rights attended to by an appeal to law. Blackburnfoot declared that the whole letter was too plainly not his own. “That fellow Blunt’s at the bottom of it, and the Duke’s backin’ him; that’s why he’s so bold.” Utter, black ruin, was all the beyond Blackburnfoot could see for this life. No wonder that when towards noon

he came into the court, his step and air were dragging and hopeless.

It was a black December day. Ink black tree-tops, relieved against mild Indian inky clouds, across which flapped solemnly some single voiceless black, black crow. The smoke from the chimney stopped short in its upward progress, and crept in long black curls along the house-top. Yet it was mild and sweet, pensive rather than sad. Like standing by the grave of one long dead, whose memory has no shade of pain, whose absence is not now deplored; how much has been since then, we bless God she was not called to share, for whom affection is still a life so real, that the heart says boldly, "we shall meet again."

Blackburnfoot saw nothing but the dust and ashes. Nothing but the bright side saw Mary who had come as fast as her little feet could carry her up the long steep two miles from Boniton. She turned from the beech avenue, and passed the outer court and the barn. The cattle in the outer court having no tender herbage to crop under the December sky, thrust out their idle heads, and bellowed lustily. A cock, with his fine arching tail blown all on one side, was resting in meek quiescence on one foot, with the other drawn cosily under his downy

feathers. A monarch under temporary difficulties, behaving admirably. The hens, less contemplative, were searching diligently after the good things of life, about the corners of the big stone step before the barn-door. Mary thought she had never almost seen "everything as bonny," and tripped round into the court as if she hadn't walked one step that day before. Her father was stooping down, poking the last night's ashes from the boiler fire, but Mary's step was checked, and her heart said, "How changed he is! How changed since last Christmas-time!"

She came softly behind him, and as he went on with his work, he groaned audibly more than once. "Father!" said Mary, softly.

He started and turned round.

"Mary! you here! How does it come?" he asked, looking pained, as at something which we cannot feel to be pleasant, because unaccountable.

"I just came away," said Mary, blushing, and feeling put out as she had never thought of, in being obliged to own to her father that she had run away.

"And they didn't know about it?"

"No."

"And why, Mary?"

"Because they would have it I would go to

Elmton, and I was set on seeing you," said Mary, the tears brimming in her eyes.

Her father caught her in his arms, and kissed her over and over, saying, vexedly, "It was very unwise of you, Mary, very unwise. Did you not let them know where you were going?"

"Yes, I left a line saying I was off to Blackburnfoot."

"Tom, Tom," called her father to the farm-boy, "get yourself ready this minute to ride the grey beast to Boniton, to go back with the coach to town. I'll give you a letter, and tell you where to leave it. We'll go in, Mary. I'll write a line to Mrs. Bright, and tell her you're here, and ask her to pardon you this time, as you were so set on seeing me. But, mind, you've done a very foolish thing."

Mary felt sorely disappointed. Her father thought her way of coming so wrong, his pleasure in it seemed quite spoiled. Her mother looked almost sorry she had come at all. It must be true what aunt Jane said of their wish that she should go to Elmton. She found it very difficult not to cry for vexation, while her father sat gravely writing, and her mother had gone to bring her something to eat. But when her father had dismissed Tom with his note, and asked her to come with him into the

court, and nervously doing odds and ends of would-be business, told her all about Gilbert's letter, and declared that nothing but black ruin lay before them, and groaned in an utter misery that wouldn't let him keep still one moment, how glad Mary felt that she had run to him any way, so she was with him.

"What for need you mind so much, father?" she said, putting her arm quietly in his. "If we are put back to the way we were before; it was far happier the way we were before."

"Oh, Mary, woman! why should ye talk about a thing ye know nothing about?" asked her father, facing her with dreary fixed eyes. "Of course we'll be utterly ruined; everything we have in the world taken to pay expenses. I have no prospect, none whatever, of anything but ending my days in a gaol; and you and your mother—God knows——" And the poor man turned away and lifted up his voice in a lamentable moaning wail, that told of a fierce conflict with overhanging, uncomprehended misery.

Mary was terribly awed. She believed in the truth of his despairing words with a whole-hearted wretchedness of belief, that only the very young can give to the despairing words of a grief-struck man. The miserable, whole-hearted belief sank down on her young spirit, "a heavier weight than lead."

"Father," she said, softly, "will you not go an' see George, an' tell him about it?"

Something like a ray of hope came to her heart as she remembered how George had scouted the idea of the Duke's having power to ruin them in this way. Perhaps he might put it out of her father's head again.

"George!" echoed her father, sharply. "What could he know about it?"

His jealousy rose up at the idea that George would disbelieve what was so certain. Yet he did want to go and tell George. To show him the letter, and let him see how right he had been; and when he looked in Mary's sweet young face, her look of belief was so unoffendingly hopeless, that he said, appeased,—

"I might like well enough to have a talk wi' George, but I have no heart to go so far."

"But you'll go if I go with ye, father?" said Mary, drawing his arm caressingly through hers, and pressing it down to make him lean on her. "You'll not mind goin' the short cut through the glen, if I'm with you to talk to?"

"You! but you've gone too far to-day already."

"Never mind me," said Mary, with a miserable little laugh, that looked to her like a desecration, "I'm strong enough."

“Good wife,” called Blackburnfoot, “we’re off to Stanecroft. We’ll not be long.”

Mary and her father went round the back of the house, to go down the steep orchard ground into the glen, pursuing the “short cut” to Stanecroft. A trim little body, bustling in black silk flounces, entered the court just in time to see them leave it, and coming smartly round, called after them as they began to descend the brae, the father more in need of Mary’s arm than he could have believed to find himself.

“So, miss, you think you’ve played a very clever trick, I fancy!”

Mary started, as if she had met the principle of all evil. That tiresome, clanging tongue again, in full pursuit of her, and her father so unable to bear it. She darted an imploring look at her. Her tormentor hailed it as showing how vulnerable she was.

“I hope you approve of your daughter running away from school, nobody knows where. Poor Mrs. Bright sent begging me to come out here, and see if I could find any clue to her.”

“I have already sent Tom the boy in by the coach, with a letter for Mrs. Bright, telling her that Mary’s here, and asking her to overlook her fault for

this time, as she had been so sorely tormented," said her father, dignifiedly. "It's a pity you put yourself to so much unnecessary trouble. Meanwhile, we're just setting off to walk to Stanecroft."

"To *Stanecroft*!" echoed the lady, with uplifted hands. "Well, if that's not the barefacedest thing ever I did see in my life! So this is why you're so anxious to see your father and mother that you run off from school, miss! Away to see your very particular friends at Stanecroft, before an hour's time. Upon my word, that would have been reckoned something considerable forward when I was a miss."

There was such intolerable insinuation in the woman's look and tone, Mary's face burned crimson, as if she had done something to be greatly ashamed of.

"I'm just going wi' my father. He wants to go, and would I let him go alone?" she flashed out, ready to cry for vexation at being so charged.

"A mighty convenient excuse, I must allow—quite fortunate!" replied aunt Jane, with infinite mockery in her tone.

"I needn't go to Stanecroft," cried poor Mary; "I'll go with my father through the glen to the top o' the brae on the other side. And then, father, you'll be sure to get somebody home with ye most o' the way. George'll be sure to come with ye," she

said, determined not to be made ashamed to speak of George, by aunt Jane's impertinence.

They set off quickly down the orchard into the glen, almost running to escape aunt Jane's tongue. Through the glen, and over the little ivy-grown bridge they went very silently, the old man every now and then uttering a low groan as if forced out by very heart-anguish. Very slowly Mary got him up the long steep road on the other side, till they came to the level at the top where lay the little village of Stanecroft. Before the tailor's trim cottage at the other end of the village from the farmhouse, Mary drew her arm from her father's, and taking his one hand in both hers, and stroking it, as she looked lovingly in his face, said—

“ Now, father dear, you'll go straight to George, an' tell him all about it.”

“ Well, well, maybe I will.”

He walked off slowly and uncertainly. Mary stood and looked after him till he turned the bend in the village street. It seemed so hard not to go with him.

“ If the mistress gibes at him, or the auld laird heckles him, I should have been with him.”

But pride held her back, and she turned and walked quickly home to the Blackburnfoot, to show

how short she had been away. Here aunt Jane had been expatiating to her mother on all the aggravations of Mary's conduct. The mother, in her turn, imparted the dismal tidings of Gilbert's letter, and of the black ruin that hung over them.

"Well, to be sure," cried aunt Jane, "what a story made out of a low man's letter! How can he ruin you? And if he takes the case to law, he'll be sure to lose it. I fancy there never was any person yet tried anything but they were threatened by somebody or other. But you country folks are so ignorant, everything puts you in a state."

It wore late in the afternoon, and very dark. Her father had not returned, and Mary was watching anxiously behind the house, listening for footstep or voice. She dreaded his walking far alone, so crushed and broken as he was by fear, and she longed, too, to see if George would have again put it out of his head. Now and then the winter moon struggled to show a blink of her pale face. No sudden, rustling, pattering sound of bird or beast broke the silence of the orchard. Every mousie was cosy in his "wee bit bield" about the roots of the old trees. For the birds, who can tell where they are on such a night? The wind came 'soughing' down the glen, and shook the old fruit-trees gently, making many strange,

indefinite sounds an anxious ear might turn to what it pleased. Was that a groan? Was that a sigh? Was not that crackling sound like one falling near the bridge in the glen? Mary got eerie and restless, as she stood bareheaded, listening eagerly, with one arm thrown round a great apple-tree near the top of the bank.

At last a definite sound reached the watchful ear. The sound of a human voice, showing by contrast how unlike it the other sounds had been. It was not her father's voice—it was George's. So, just as she certainly trusted he would, George had brought her father home. Over the little bridge, and through the glen, came the two voices, talking close and earnestly, only the tones audible.

As they came up the orchard she heard George say something about the coach-office to-morrow morning, and then call out "Good night!" The moon shining out showed her father's figure climbing the steep bank alone.

Mary threw herself on the tree, with that strange, sympathetic feeling imaginative young ones have with trees they have known from infancy, and hid her face on a bough rough with grey lichen.

"He might have come in, and I had so much to tell him. He might have come and asked for me,

and me been so long away; and was so near goin' to see him the first thing I did."

The moonbeam broke from behind the clouds, stole through the leafless boughs, crept waveringly down the lichen-grown trunk, and rested faintly on the fair young head. It said, "Poor child! poor child!" or I have no skill of such things.

Mary drew herself up, shook her head impatiently, as if half angry with herself, and went to meet her father. He drew his arm through hers, asked lightly what she did out there bareheaded—she would catch a bad cold after not being used to it.

They went to the farmer's parlour. Aunt Jane was happily upstairs.

"And what are you thinking now, father dear?" Mary asked, when he was seated in his big chair.

"George thinks it's not so bad," said her father. "He says Gilbert's a terrible bully, and that even if the Duke's people are in it, the way it's done is more as if they wanted to frighten me, knowing they could do nothing more. But he will have me go with him to-morrow morning to show the letter to the lawyer that made the bargain about the coals, and see what he says about it."

"God bless him for his kindness and his mindfulness!" cried Mary's heart, as it rose with a bound, throwing off the heavy load that had weighed on it the last few hours. The ruin was neither so utter, nor so certain.

"And did George ask for our Mary?" asked the mother, either from idle woman's curiosity, or from a mother's instinct that poor Mary would like to know, and couldn't ask.

"No," said the father, "not that I mind. No, he didn't. I suppose he heard me telling the rest. I told them she had come with me to tailor Stitcher's house. Betsy and Eelin were asking a great deal about her. He said he couldn't come in just now, as he hadn't rubbed down his horses yet."

Meanwhile what was George about? Walking tempestuously—excuse a poetic word, reader; none other would so well convey the meaning—walking tempestuously up and down, to and fro, under the great beech-trees that grow in both sides of the hedgerow, as one enters the village of Stanecroft. The wind roaring in the tops of the beech-trees, made a grand music to keep time to. The whole scene was fitted to call forth calm, nay, holy feeling, but I grieve to say my hero was in a towering passion. More than once he stood and stamped his

feet furiously. More than once he loudly quoted hackneyed opinions of womankind in general, I would rather not help to perpetuate, by repeating. Now their utter worthlessness and worldliness, ideal aunt Jane. Now their want of all real good or standing principle, ideal Mary's mother. Now their being inconstant as beautiful, frail and pliable, as graceful and gentle, ideal our poor little Mary. For what man crossed in love, is at the same time perfectly just? That is, your hero may be a superior person who is always just, mine was not. He was terribly angry, and very unjust.

"To think of her coming this far—all this way, and then turning!" he said to himself. "She must have been determined to insult us, determined to *show* that she was determined to insult us."

When he found his way home, and his sisters demanded if he had seen Mary, he flung out of the room, banging the door after him, without having the civility to notice their question. It was very unamiable, only some people have a way of being so ill-timed and so provoking with their questions.

It was little better when he betook himself to the stable, to rub down his horses, whistling in a bravura way, "She's fair an' she's fause," the

it would be to be caught so far from home, with nothing on her head but a cap.

She strolled on, with a shadowy remembrance of a time when she was young, very young, when a father, a mother, and a brother, dead, long dead, kept New Year's times with her and her sisters. No human being is quite heartless, and any heart aunt Jane had, was stirring in her that bright winter morning, as she sauntered along between the glorified hedgerows, led on by the same feeling as even yet often led her through the mazes of the most romantic novel. Most strange in those "love in a cottage" preferences, which in real life she characterized as "perfect disgusting," with those very preferences, when detailed in romance, she indulged a tearful sympathy.

It was not of malice prepense that she sauntered slowly on, even to the cross-road, just as Miss Betsy and Miss Eelin, arrayed in their very best, brushed gaily along on their way to Boniton.

Their greeting expressed some surprise. It was a surprising thing to meet so genteel a person as Miss Jane Burns all this way from home, with nothing on her head but a cap. Miss Burns expressed much amusement at her own frolic.

The conversation turned on Mary.

"How was Mary? They were astonished that she hadn't come to see them. They would have been to see her, but fancied she should have come first to see them."

"Well, I don't know," remarked aunt Jane. "Mary's always busy; she's practising the music and the languages a good deal. Mary's getting into regular stylish society. Miss Melville, her great friend at school, belongs just to the first set in town, most stylish people. Mary was to have gone with her to her aunt's place, Elmtown, at the Christmas time, but her father was so anxious for her to come home, she didn't go. But no doubt she'll go some other time. I have no fears of her now, she'll just go up and up, till oncet she gets fairly in with the people she should be in with. And it may be," she added, facetiously, opening her eyes wide, and smiling knowingly, "it may be that new friends are making her forget old ones a little. Oh, that may be! It's generally the way, more especially with young people."

The young women meekly assented to the truth of this last observation, and with a heavy weight of tantalized admiration on their hearts, took leave of their fashionable acquaintance, and silently pursued their way.

The winter sun had nearly run his course before the two girls returned to Stanecroft, and was going down white and cold behind the big beech-trees, "far south the lift," leaving the court-yard to all the blackness and hardness of an unusually "stiff frost."

They came in, their cheeks shining with frosty health, puffing clouds of white steam, like first-rate locomotives.

George, contrary to his wont, sat idly in the chimney-nook, and wearied for their coming. The afternoon seemed to him strangely slow and far behind. He had been most necessarily looking to the state of the fences this bright forenoon. Most necessarily he had been looking to the state of the fences opposite the Blackburnfoot braes. Thence he had perceived Mary going out and in, bareheaded, lightsome, and simple as a child, feeding the fowls, patting the cows, &c. &c. His wrath had melted before the sweet image, like a pompous pillar of ice on an open February day. It had no strength to stand before it, and when it was gone, who could say of what it had been built? "Continual droppings on a very rainy day." But the rainy day was over and gone, the icy hardness that gave the droppings shape and substance had thawed, and where was the seeming rock-hard pile? Vanished

like a mist, with nothing to mark its whereabouts, or tell of what it had been fashioned.

Since, for the first time for years, he had not gone to see Mary on New Year's morning, he would spend this evening with her, though both gate and door were guarded on either side by an aunt Jane.

So he sat, and thought the hours till evening long and slow—sat in the chimney nook, and wearied for his sisters' coming.

The girls found their mother in the kitchen, busy about the evening meal, and from his nook by the parlour fire George heard them retail their morning's conversation with aunt Jane. Mary's business at "the music" and "the languages," her "genteel friends," her "grand invitations," her "lovely dresses," her being brought home at this time by her father's anxiety to see her, but the tempting invitation to be accepted again.

He heard his sisters' admiring, envying comments and annotations, as in a dream. The sunlight in his heart was gone out. The cold black night settled down, in which the icy pillar of his proud reserve rose again hard and stern.

He rose and went out, feeling it intolerable to be seen, most of all talked to. From the yard he went to the barn, searching vacantly for some-

thing in some way to screen him from himself and others. A pile of unthreshed oats met his eye, and a trusty friend, a heavy flail. He drew off his jacket mechanically, shut up the folding-doors, and fell vehemently to work.

"Where's George?" asked his sisters. "Can that be him threshing in the barn at this time o' night—what does he mean by that?"

The dim light of the tallow candle stuck against the rough stone wall, showed George's valiant strokes with the heavy flail, but shrouded the hopeless misery that had settled on his handsome face.

On and on came the heavy strokes. The family sat down to supper, and still the dull thumping, muffled by distance, was all that marked George's whereabouts.

"What does George mean by this?" asked the old man, peevishly; "why doesn't he come to supper? What's he in such a hurry about that piece of work for?"

Miss Eelin volunteered to go and fetch him.

"Sit down on your seat and mind your own business," said her mother, sharply, and nor husband nor child were in the habit of disputing the word of the mistress of Stanecroft.

The mother's eyes had caught George's re-

treating figure while his sisters' tongues were going so fast. The mother's instinct knew it all, how he worked, poor fellow, and why. She had been strangely enlightened on the subject, since that day last spring when she had called forth such a torrent of rage and indignation, by telling him Mary was no fit match for him. Her worldly mind thought, too, how much more grievous any cross in his love must be, now Mary was so great an heiress. No, she thought that it was a disappointment now to herself, not that it was more so to George, for, strange mystery, hearts the hardest, the worldliest, the meanest, can believe in true love.

The hard woman's heart mourned with her son, while every stroke of his flail fell, audibly, consciously, on her ear, as if she were watching the throbbing of his pulses through the crisis-hour of a deadly fever.

On and on fell the heavy strokes, hour after hour, and the mother kept watch over them, while she seemed wholly engrossed in her usual occupations, with a pitying anxiety she had never known before.

The candle on the wall burned to its socket, shot a long sudden blaze up the wall, showing every deserted swallow's nest and ancient cobweb in the

rafters, and then went out, leaving all in utter darkness.

George stood suddenly brought to a stop, conscious now of fatigue of body and mind.

The deserted swallow-nests looked down on him in the sudden flare of light like the eyeless sockets of a skull. But yesterday, he thought, Mary came running to him out of this very barn; she had seen a swallow fly through between the open doors, summer was "come now," she said. Now, where were the swallows, and where was Mary?

The sight of these swallows' nests, and then the sudden darkness, broke up the silence and the hardness; he sank on the pile of straw he had been labouring at so hard, hid his face in his hands, and wept as he might have done when he wore a little linen blouse, some twenty years before.

It seemed to him he had not lain there long, when a tapping came to the closed door, once, twice. Hoping that whoever it was would go away, he took no notice of it.

"George, my son, are you there? George, my son!" came in his mother's voice.

The mother and son stood under the frosty stars, the lantern she carried throwing light only on the doorstep and George's shoes.

"Come in and try to eat a bit o' supper, my son," said the mother, laying her hand on his arm with a tenderness new to her. "Your father's gone to bed. I'll take care nobody steers ye, or passes so much as a word wi' ye."

George let his mother lead him to a chair by a little table set by the fire, spread with various delicacies. These last two hours while the mother's heart was restless with anxiety, when the noise of the flail had stopped, she had busied herself making them ready and setting them forth, till at last even *her* powers of endurance were exhausted, and she must go to seek him.

He sat here and tried to eat, while the heavy swing of the old clock's pendulum lulled him with a strange-erie-feeling of being a boy again, beside his mother, with no very definite object of his own in life.

In the kitchen, Miss Eelin's voice began to chatter, luckily not of Mary directly, though the mother saw how it would come round to that immediately.

"Be off, ye idle taupie; be off, and let us have no more o' your silly chat this night," said she, with hasty asperity as she suddenly entered.

Miss Eelin, not dreaming of resistance, withdrew, wondering why her mother's temper was so much more aggressive than usual.

CHAPTER XIII.

JEALOUSY.

"For I could never bide the lass,
That ye'd loe mair than me."—*Song.*

MANY and many a time during her ten days' stay at the Blackburnfoot, did a tearful cloud gather in poor Mary's eyes, and as often she bravely drove it back. No, she wouldn't cry. But what had she done, that her old friends should use her so? Had she not all but gone to them the very first five minutes after her arrival? She felt almost ashamed to remember it: no, she wasn't ashamed. She would never use any old friend in this way, she thought, as the heavy tears rose to her eyes, whether she would or no.

Aunt Jane knew well what was passing in her simple mind, and commented and marvelled in the most provoking terms.

"That marriage she had so often heard of between George and Mirren Baird, would be coming on, and they would be all too busy to think of anything else."

The words went to poor Mary's heart. They stung her through with a cruel jealousy. "Marriage," "long talked of," "Mirren Baird," rang through her mind perpetually.

"Well, I do wonder what he sees at her," she thought, as the plain, solid head of Mirren rose clear to her memory. "No doubt her folk's very well to do in the world," she said to herself with a sigh.

Poor child, she was so stupefied by the tidings, she couldn't even remember that since the days when she last saw Mirren she had herself become a great heiress.

"But I'm sure I wish them both well," said she, roused up, as "the tears cam' drappin' fairly" on the ancient broad window-sill. The tears were driven back. But poor little Mary! she had never felt so proud and angry, so vexed and wounded, in her whole life before.

"Mary," said her mother, looking pityingly at her, the last day of her stay, when aunt Jane was out of hearing; "d'ye think the Stanecroft

folks haven't taken it ill you haven't called? You should go to-day, at least, to see Mrs. John Hamilton; you can't well leave without doing that."

Mary's heart and her pride were sorely at war.

"Oh, no, mother, I can't go to Stanecroft, when I've been all this while, and they've never so much as looked in when they were passing."

The voice shook in spite of herself. Her mother looked pityingly again.

"Well, you know, you must go and call on Mrs. John."

She knew how things stood, and though she had a wish to separate Mary from old friends, she could ill brook to think she was suffering, while aunt Jane stood by to witness the writhing of the young victim to the honour and glory of her house and friends, with the calm indifference of a pious Hindoo, who has got to see that a niece is respectably consumed on her husband's funeral pile.

Mary's heart seized gladly on the idea of calling for Mrs. John Hamilton, and her pride admitted it had nothing to do with calling for the Stanecroft friends. She set off speedily and privately, afraid of aunt Jane's volunteering to accompany her.

If any one fancies that Mrs. John Hamilton had failed in carrying out Mrs. Simons' ideas of

what might be made of John Hamilton's house and grounds, he is mistaken. The green lawn now reached to the door, unbroken by useless tree or unsightly hedge. An invisible wire fence restrained the cattle at a few yards from the house; within this fence were nicely-shaped flower-plots, cut in the grass here and there. The parlour, with muslin curtains elegantly disposed in the windows, an open piano, books, music, and vases, no one could have recognized as the same room as that whose latent capabilities Mrs. Simons' eye had at first sight perceived.

Then Mrs. Hamilton was no slothful overseer in dairy and kitchen. Certainly Mrs. John Hamilton was a clever woman; and if it be the mark of the virtuous woman that her "husband praiseth her," truly she had this mark in perfection.

Mary, turning to the table, lifted some books that lay together: a German dictionary and Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, a French grammar and Voltaire's *Charles XII*.

"You're looking at my books," said Mrs. Hamilton, as she entered and kissed her young friend with much affection. "They're not particularly ornamental; but I've been reading them with your cousin George. He's been a most enthusiastic

student this winter. He has been very often up here."

Her last words roused Mary's jealousy. Mirren Baird was in the next farm, that was why he was so often up.

"Have you seen him lately? I'm surprised he hasn't come this last week."

"No, I haven't seen him," said Mary, absently, as she thought. "That's his marriage that's keeping him so busy he can do nothing. I wonder if Mirren learns all that. He thought I didn't care much for books. I mind him telling me I must leave off speaking Scotch. He shouldn't have settled so fast that I could do nothing." And the tears stood brimming in her eyes as she remembered how diligent she had been at all her lessons, and how she had worked at French and German, all to please George, and to be able to help him with them.

Mrs. Hamilton saw the brimming eyes, and guessed that a separation had been effected between George and Mary, and feeling that it was not her part to do anything to counteract this, did not again mention his name.

In going to Wellbrae, Mary had passed through the village of Stanecroft, passed the farmhouse, and taken the long road to Wellbrae. But in returning,

she found her way down the frozen channel of the burn that formed the 'short cut' to Stanecroft, and coming out behind the great well, just opposite the house, she somehow couldn't pass.

"No," she said to herself, "they may use me as they like. I can't forget that they are my oldest friends." She crossed the street timidly, opened the little white wicket, went up the gravel walk, and knocked at the door.

"Dearie me! Mary!" cried Miss Betsy, on opening, "I thought you were going away without once coming to see us!"

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that," said Mary, with the quietness of one held back from commonplace clearing of self, or reproaching of others, by too deep a feeling of it at the heart.

George, from some corner, had perceived Mary pass their house for Wellbrae in the forenoon; he had seen her now come down behind the well, and stand hesitating whether to come in or pass on, and now he heard her quiet, "Oh, no, I couldn't do that." She too evidently wished to pass, but thought it was hardly possible. She had put off coming till her last day, that they might have no opportunity of returning her visit. He felt the fancied insult to his very heart.

"But she'll find I'm not ashamed of what I am," he said to himself, and marched off to the parlour, with a high-wrought pride of his farming dress and coarse shoes.

Meanwhile, his sisters had been assailing Mary with questions as to the boarding-school, and as to her friend Miss Melville, her aunt had been telling them of.

"Oh, she's very nice and very good," said Mary, simply. "I had a very nice letter from her this morning. She's very vexed I didn't go with her to Elmtou, but you know I had to come to see my father."

Of this last sentence George got the full benefit as he entered the parlour. Mary's earnest eyes were fixed on his mother, pleading her own excuse as to having come home, with no other thought than that everybody would be thinking she ought to have gone to Elmtou. George felt disgusted by how evidently she would have liked to go, and was obliged to come home because her father wanted her.

"And is Elmtou a very fine place?" asked Miss Betsy, admiringly.

"Oh, I think so," said Mary; "at least aunt Jane says they're the stylishest people all round about."

George might have caught the roguish laugh in the eyes, meaning to convey a quiet joke against poor aunt Jane and her love of stylishness, but he didn't. He was again deeply disgusted. Such a terrible change in so short a time was almost unbelievable. But such was womankind, and such were young ladies' boarding-schools.

It was not long before Mary proposed to go, and was allowed to go without offer of convoy. She walked through the village, and went down the glen, sad and wondering.

"Why, even if George were to be married to Mirren Baird, should he not be friendly with herself? She never could have fancied he would change so. He didn't even seem in the least glad to see her."

CHAPTER XIV.

AUNT JANE SHAPES "THE RAVELL'D SLEEVE OF CARE."

"She talks o' rank an' fashion."

MARY returned to school next day much saddened, and very doubtful of much happiness being to be had in this world, had set her dear little heart not a little on the next.

During Easter Mrs. Bright gave eight days' holiday; and now aunt Jane and Miss Melville had their way of it.

Mary was to spend these holidays at Elmton. The days of her stay at Elmton passed heavily to Mary. How they flew past Grace Melville! Yet the young laird of Elmton was at every opportunity paying to Mary assiduous attention, aided and abetted by his sister Margaret, who thought that if Mary was as rich as was said, she would be a capital

thing for her queerish eldest brother. Margaret admired Mary, and Mary admired Margaret. The two girls drew together, and whatever they were about in the afternoons, walking, talking, or working, Alfred was sure to be by. His bantering and laughing with Margaret were not putting out, like his attentions to herself, and so Mary came to be rather amused by his presence—rather to miss him in his absence. And yet, as I have said, the days passed heavily to her; while to Grace, who was flattered only by the youngest son—a fortuneless, briefless, young advocate—how they flew! and how the girl's cheeks and eyes shone!

Alfred Dunlop drove into town every morning to attend, as was said, to his business letters. He had for this purpose an elegant Irish car.

It was about the fifth day of Mary's visit, that Margaret said she meant to drive into town with him, as she must get some flowers and gloves. "Mary and Grace shall go, too, and you must make the man sit on the box in front."

"Quite delighted!" cried Alfred. "I'll do anything to oblige your ladyship."

On reaching town they drove, first of all, to a certain large millinery depôt to choose flowers. Who should be in the shop but aunt Jane, also selecting.

flowers. Let us hope they were simply for her own cap, and that she has ceased to get up caps for others, if indeed it wasn't a libel that she ever did so. The quantity of flowers she had picked out was rather unaccountable, but then, as her sister Miss Catherine said, "she choosed all her niece Miss Hamilton of Blackburnfoot's things."

Why did Miss Burns beat so hasty a retreat into the back shop, saying to the girls sewing there, in a suppressed whisper, "Mercy on us! I hope there's no chance they'll come here! That's my niece, Miss Hamilton, of Blackburnfoot, with some of her fashionable friends, and I feel so caught!"

Margaret didn't take an unpardonable time to select her flowers, and then the party left the shop. Miss Jane Burns darted out to see where they went next. "That lounging, fashionable-looking fellow, with the glass in his eye, by Mary's side wherever she went," was indeed a sight to stretch one's neck to see. They crossed the street, and went into a glover's some doors up.

Now was aunt Jane's opportunity to pounce out on the man, and cleverly hear what was to be heard. Luckily, they had left the car standing where they had first descended at the milliner's door. Out came aunt Jane.

"Mr. Dunlop's carriage, I presume?"

"Yes," said the man shortly; "his car."

"I'm Miss Hamilton of Blackburnfoot's aunt, the young lady that's staying there at present. I didn't somehow take in who they were till oncet they were past. I'm so sorry I hadn't an opportunity of speaking to them. But I fancy you can tell me if she's well," she continued, slipping a half-crown into his hand.

"Quite well, thank you, ma'am," said the man, touching his hat deferentially.

"Mr. Dunlop seems to think pretty well of her, I think?" said aunt Jane.

Now she was very much mistaken, if she fancied that the man's eyes and ears were in the least deceived as to her whereabouts in the social scale. He felt very completely on an equality, and almost tipped her a wink, as he remarked, "*Coming't uncommon strong*, it seems to me. I wonder if we behold the future lady of Elmton? Mr. Alfred doesn't mind the young ladies much in a general way."

Aunt Jane's heart jumped so, she lacked utterance for a moment. Then she said in a manner which she meant to be quiet, but with an excited tremble in her voice,—

"She'll very likely never look at him; she's a

very wealthy miss, that, and so pretty that she'll be sure to be tremendously run after when oncet she fairly comes out. And any one making up to Miss Melville? "

" Oh, as for that," retorted the man, " Mr. Sam—that's the youngest son—he's evidently far gone about *her*. That may be a match ; as for the young laird, he'll be ill to catch," he added, his dignity sorely hurt by this woman's insinuation that her niece could refuse his master.

Aunt Jane darted off and got round a corner : she perceived the party about to leave the glover's.

That night aunt Jane remembered that Miss Betsy of Stanecroft had once applied to her for a shape of a sleeve. It was shameful to have so long neglected to send it. She immediately cut it out in paper, and enclosed it with the following friendly letter :—

" DEAR MISS BETSY,—

" I AM really ashamed of myself, being so long of sending you the shape you wanted, which I now enclose with many apologies. I hope it may still be in time to serve you.

" You will be asking if I have seen Mary, or rather Miss Hamilton of Blackburnfoot. I saw her

to-day in town, with the carriage, with young Mr. Dunlop of Elmton. She and Miss Melville are staying at Elmton just now. It is a splendid place, and Mr. Alfred Dunlop is the young laird.

"She was dashing about the town with him and his pretty sister, and Miss Melville. Everybody was looking at them, and I must say he looked very stylish, and she looked very pretty and quite polished up.

"Folks say there will be two weddings there, for the youngest brother seems as much taken up with Miss Melville as the young laird is with Mary.

"I hope you are all well. Give my compliments to your mother. I hope Mr. George is getting well on with his spring work this fine weather.

"With best compliments,

"I am yours,

"JANE BURNS."

Aunt Jane's heart glowed with exultation to think what a triumph this was over the mistress of Stanecroft and her homely girls.

Could this woman, with her nature, fully comprehend the agony of suffering this letter would bring to one heart in that household?

No, in common charity, let me say no. Her

nature couldn't fathom or understand it. It is some excuse for her inhumanity.

"A letter!" "A letter for you!" "A letter from such a one!" "A letter in a hand I don't know." To what strange misery may such commonplace words be the introduction.

"There's a letter for you, Betsy," cried Miss Eelin next evening.

George was sitting in the chimney nook reading, having, he flattered himself, done almost a better day's work than if he had no care at heart at all.

"It's from Miss Burns, I declare, with the shape of a sleeve I spoke to her about never so long ago. It's strange she should mind to send it now."

George's heart sank; he, with the clairvoyance of true love, read the letter without having seen a word of it. "She's to be married," glared on his mind like the breaking-up of a thunder-cloud.

Miss Betsy read the letter, put it in her pocket, and was about to leave the room. George needn't see it yet, he would hear all in good time, no doubt.

"Let me see that letter, Bess!" cried he, with that hateful lightness of tone, by which men strive to hide strong feeling.

He had been apparently so engrossed in his book, she hoped he had scarcely noticed the letter.

AUNT JANE SHAPES A "RAVELL'D SLEEVE." 135

Betsy turned, looked in his face and hesitated.

"What's the use of your seeing all my letters, at least letters about shapes of sleeves," she said, sharply, hoping to make him believe she wished to keep back the letter from mere whim and unsociability.

"That letter's about no sleeve, my woman."

The words were uttered in such a weary, broken-hearted tone, the undemonstrative Miss Betsy had nearly thrown her arms round her brother's neck and burst into tears. But instead, she put the letter in his hand, and ran from the room.

* * * * *

"I would like to go out in the park," said Mary, looking wistfully through the glass-door, as she walked about the brilliantly-lighted hall, with Margaret after dinner.

"I can't say I fancy it much, it's nearly dark, and there's such a 'sough' in the wind."

"Do you think I might go out?" said Mary, not noticing Margaret's remark.

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it so much, and I'll go too, for that matter, and so, I daresay, will Grace."

The three girls put on warm shawls and overshoes, and went to walk in the park. Above the dark forms of the leafless elm-trees the red planet

Mars shone in the dusk-grey sky. One or two other stars began to blink out dim and white. The March wind swept over the whitened grass. Mary fixed her eyes on the beautiful star, and walked quickly and silently, lost in a dreamy sense of a heavy sadness weighing at her heart.

"What was wrong with her?" "Why did she feel as if the world was sinking away from her?" How willingly she could have burst into sobs and tears. Margaret and Grace linked their arms together and talked, pacing backwards and forwards. Mary walked up and down under the elm-trees. The red star, the March wind, the white rings worn round the trees by the gambols of last year's lambs, every sight and sound brought back her old life.

"Oh, George, George," she whispered, leaning her forehead on the rugged elm trunk, "and my father, and my mother, and auld lang syne, when I was as happy's the day was long. I can't live this sort of life much longer, I must get home. Surely there can be nothing wrong, I feel so strange."

She was roused by hearing Mr. Alfred Dunlop's voice, asking,—

"And where is Miss Hamilton? What wild

escapade is this, you three graces have indulged in?"

Her companions directed him to the elm-trees for her whereabouts. She came hastily out to join them, but Margaret and Grace walked towards the house. Mr. Alfred came and joined himself to her.

Mary walked as fast as she could after her companions; Mr. Alfred revolved in his mind that it was unsafe, very, to let her leave to-morrow without trying to interest her decidedly in himself, and yet, as to anything too clear, that wasn't to be thought of, till he was more certain of the truth of all that mere report said. Mary walked fast, Alfred tried to linger.

"And so you leave us to-morrow?" he said.

"Yes."

"How lightly you look, Miss Hamilton, at what is so serious a grief to me."

Mary quickened her steps, she hardly knew why.

Alfred tried to take her hand.

"Dear Mary, may I call you Mary? Will you try not to forget me? Promise to remember me just a very little."

Mary drew her hand from him, ran to the house, to her own room, and wept tears of vexation. "I can't bear him when he talks that way," she cried

to herself, and stamped her little foot for her own especial gratification. Her pride was so hurt by his taking her hand she couldn't even tell Grace of it.

* * * *

"Mother," said George, coming into the parlour, as his mother was about to leave it for the night; "mother, come and sit down, I have something to say to you."

"Well, my son," said the mistress of Stanecroft, sitting down to listen; "well, my son, say on."

"Mother, I'm going away," said George, looking into the fire to avoid looking at her. "I'm going abroad, I can't stand it any longer."

"It's very hard for you, my son, but you ought to be able to face it out," said the resolute woman. "A little false-hearted, light-headed lassie, I always told you I thought nothing of her."

"Don't now, mother, she's not to blame. But I'm quite resolved now to go to Australia by the first ship that sails. It would do me good to see the world."

"Think a minute now, George, before you speak," said the mother, with firm calmness. "How are your father and I possibly to get on here without you? Set yourself to think sensibly how we are

to manage; you must think for us as well as for yourself." She had no idea of yielding weakly even to George.

"Do you suppose, mother, I could forget that?" said George, mournfully; "but I think it may be quite easy. You know I've laid up some money in the bank. After paying my passage, and getting a few things I'll want, I think there may be as much as a hundred pounds over. That'll pay a good ploughman for four or five years, and before I go I'll make it my business to find a good man for the place. With him, things may go just as they do when I'm here."

"Oh, my son, what a woeful difference to me!" said the mother, fixing her eyes on him with the pathetic tenderness of the one strong affection of a hard strong nature. "I see you have it all laid out, all ready. If it must be, George, I must try to bear it, but oh, my son, if you would only think it, you're better with your own mother."

"Mother, don't talk so," said George, caressing her. "Don't break my heart about it. I'm set on going. You're not the kind mother to worry a poor fellow when he's hard enough up already," he said, gulping down the big tears that were rising to his eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

AUNT JANE BRINGS TIDINGS.

"Shy she was, and I thought her cold;
Thought her proud, and fled over the sea;
Fill'd I was with folly and spite,
When Ellen Adair was dying for me."

ABOUT eight days after Mary's return to school, aunt Jane made her an evening visit. It was now the beginning of April. Aunt Jane talked of many indifferent subjects, saying at last, "And what do you think of your cousin George's plans?"

"What plans?" asked Mary, in an unsteady voice; "his marriage to Mirren?"

"Oh! over and above that, he's going to Australia. He's a brave fellow, it's a fine opening for a young man."

Poor little Mary! Very white and very faint she leaned heavily on the bed-post, and asked in a husky voice,—

"When did he think of that? I never heard a word of it?"

"Indeed! He sails in ten days. Quite a sudden thing, apparently. Whether he's to take Mirren with him just at first, or whether she may be to follow him, I can't say; but I fancy she'll be to follow him, there's hardly time for the marriage to be, at least I should think not. They would be a decent-looking couple, Mirren's a comely lass."

How her tormentor made her exit, how she disappeared and left her to herself, Mary never knew. After a time she was conscious that she was sitting on a chair, leaning on the post of the bed, and that the wide world seemed to be turned upside down, hurled suddenly—let me so appropriate the awfully expressive words in all reverence—into "the blackness of darkness for ever."

She had somehow ceased to believe in George's marriage to Mirren Baird; but, added to this, that he was going away out of her world entirely; that the place that knew him would know him no more: how was she to stand it? Australia? yes, Australia. If her father, and her mother, and herself, and George, and "all the folk," as she conclusively summed up all others with whom her former life had been familiar, if they could all find themselves in

Australia, with the boarding-school and fashion, and riches and style, all forgotten and swept away like a dream, Australia might indeed be a new land of a new happiness. But to go alone! to leave all behind him, to cut himself off from all their life, and works, and thoughts; to leave her father without his help and comfort, to leave all Scotland a blank and a desolation! "Oh, George, George, how could you be so cruel?" she sobbed, hiding her face on the bed; and the cold stupefied state in which she sat, broke up in a tempest of sobs and tears.

Grace Melville found her lying on the bed, shaken and torn by the whirlwind of grief, till she was, as the Scotch country people say, "quite souple." Supple, white and cold.

"Mary," cried her friend, coming into the dark room.

"Yes," answered a voice, striving to be commonplace, but of which the lightest tone told its tale of deep suffering, as effectually as any length of explanation. Grace struck a light and lighted the gas. Mary looked ghastly white in its glare.

"Mary, dear, your father and mother?" cried Grace, in quick sympathy.

"No, no," said Mary, turning away her head.

"Your cousin George?" whispered Grace, stoop-

ing over her, for Grace had found out that she had a "cousin George."

"He's going away," sobbed Mary.

"Away! where to?"

"Australia."

"Australia! But you said he was to be married: what does it matter to you, Mary, where he goes?" said Grace, sitting down beside her on the bed, and laying a towel she had dipped in cold water over her friend's head and temples. "I wouldn't mind it if I were you, I would make him very welcome to go just where he liked. Besides, you know, Mary, Australia's not like India; it's such a healthy place, there's no fear of his health there," she added, soothingly, as if she felt that her very final view of things was after all, at present, little likely to be consolatory.

"I don't care who he marries, if he would only stay still where he is among us all," cried Mary, shaking anew with passionate grief.

"That's like the pretty Scotch song," thought Grace, as she sat helplessly watching Mary's new paroxysm, the words beating time to the air in her head. "It's no that she's Jamie's at a', a', but it's just that she'll aye be awa', awa', it's just that she'll aye be awa'.

"Well, I can't understand that," mused Grace ; "if Sam were to marry any one else," and the little woman nervously clenched her hands, and her eyes shot fire, "he might go to the world's end for anything I would care. But Mary's a strange girl, I so often can't understand her."

"You two girls not in bed yet?" called Mrs. Bright's voice, as she tapped smartly at the door ; "it's perfectly absurd, young girls like you out of bed at this time of night." Young girls that this night's hours make old in suffering.

Two days after Mary got a letter from her father, informing her of her cousin George's sudden resolve to sail for Australia, by the ship leaving next week. He expressed the utmost sorrow at the prospect of his departure, and desired her immediately to procure, and send by the coach to Boniton, the handsomest pocket Bible that was to be found, and to ask her writing master, as a favour to her father, to write on the fly-leaf,—

"To George Hamilton, a parting gift from James Hamilton," and under, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace;" and under that again the words, "Very pleasant hast thou been unto me."

"It's my last parting with him," said the writer, "and next to you and your mother, he has been my greatest comfort."

Poor Mary, with many tears she carefully copied on a sheet of paper what her father wanted put on the leaf of the Bible, and entrusted it to Grace, to get Mr. Penman to write it. She could not have asked him, or spoken one word on the subject, for worlds.

Mary and Grace got leave from Mrs. Bright to go and buy the Bible, when Grace explained to her what their errand was. There was no pleasing Mary in the beauty of the volume, but at last it was chosen.

Her lessons that evening were not touched. On four little bits of perforated board she worked the words, "Stanecroft," "Blackburnfoot," "Boniton," "Scotland," stitched them on narrow blue ribbon, tacked them together at the top, with "G" on the one side and "H" on the other, for "George Hamilton," and put them through the little Bible. "Blackburnfoot" was in at the 107th Psalm, with its stirring terrors of the deep; "Scotland," opposite the page on which is told the story of the dead son restored to his widow-mother. The marker opposite the page was too indefinite, a faint little

pencil-line marked the words, "The only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

Next day the two girls, accompanied by Miss Merton the governess, set off to the coach-office to give it into the careful keeping of Duncan M'Alister the driver.

"I think I should write him a line to take good-bye," said Mary to Grace, that evening.

"Well, I wouldn't, if I were you," said Grace, firmly, her hands clenching again, at the thought of the terrible cut of his marrying any one else. "I certainly wouldn't write him a word if I were in your place; you just did enough sewing the markers, let him write and thank you for them; he must know they're your doing."

Poor Mary, she was stopped again by Grace's so strongly expressed opinion. Perhaps it would be wrong, perhaps his mother and sisters would laugh at her, if she wrote. She somehow couldn't feel like a child now, as she did so shortly before. Then her cheeks tingled crimson at the idea that his mother and sisters, and Mirren Baird, might laugh at her markers. How she wished she hadn't made one of them "Blackburnfoot!"

She need not have been afraid of her markers being laughed at. George knew her work and

blessed her for even that. He looked at them tenderly and most sadly, as a proof how much gentle goodness may be mixed up with how much worldliness, weakness, and practical worthlessness.

"Why did she not even write to one with whom she had been so intimate, when she knew he was about to leave the country?"

Miss Jane Burns came all the way from "town," to call to offer her adieux. "Why didn't her niece come with her?" But oh, how horrible was her talk! Mary, Mary perpetually—her wealth, her fashion, her beauty, her beaux. How thoroughly she had already vulgarized and spoiled that sweet innocent girl!

Against some people, in some matters, every trifling incident, every lightest circumstance, seems to range itself in battle array, to withstand their progress in that on which their hearts are set. It was so with our Mary. At the last she wrote, not to George—Grace said she couldn't do that, he had not sent to thank her for the markers—but to his sister Betsy. Better for her that she had never put pen to paper. Every word of it told against her, and yet it was a simple little note, of which the reader may be convinced, if we lay it before him. Here it is:—

"DEAR BETSY,

"I HAVE wished much to write to you about George's going away.

"Oh, Betsy, do you not think it is a great pity he is going to Australia? His father and mother will miss him so much, and so will my father. No other ploughman can ever be the same to them as their own son. I am very sorry myself. I do hope that whatever may happen, he and I will always be good friends, as we have always been. Will you tell him this from me, and say that I wish him more than well, whatever may be.

"Your affectionate

"MARY HAMILTON."

The reader may perceive that this letter has reference to George's supposed marriage to Mirren Baird. Not so did George. He was in utter ignorance of the shadow of any ground for such a report; therefore it never struck him that any such report could be. To him the letter bore the most unmistakable marks of Mary's marriage. Aunt Jane's offensive remarks the other day, which he had heard through his sisters, as to "the style of thing that became Mary now, she being likely to be the lady of Elmton, and that," couldn't be

plainer than Mary's "whatever may happen," "whatever may be." She must be lady of Elmdon; he was, as she said, a "ploughman" whose equal his father and mother would scarcely find; and she was pleased to express a hope that they might still be on friendly terms. The kindly little letter was a bitter morsel to George. And in truth, it was a fate on our Scotch Mary, as it is said to have been on *the* Scotch Mary. It would have been well for her that she had not learned the use of the pen.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT OF THE "OLD WORLD."

"We know not——
If death is between us,
Or only the main."—HOOD.

BLACKBURNFOOT was shown into Mrs. Bright's drawing-room, looked uneasily round, and settled himself on a chair that didn't look very much too fine for him.

The door opened, and Mary, white and trembling, came and took him round the neck.

She had been thoroughly ill-used, poor child. That day, George's mother and sisters, and Mary's father, had accompanied George to the nearest seaport, where his ship lay, and they had not asked Mary to go with them. And now, when they must pass through the town in which she was, not one of them but her father had come to see her. She felt very sore at heart. Not even to father or

mother was George's departure what it was to Mary; and yet her share in it was so utterly unrecognized by every one. It was very lonely. Perhaps it was well for her that her true deep heart grief was for the time diverted somewhat into the channel of the lighter grief of feeling herself thoroughly ill-used and aggrieved.

"And he's off," she sobbed out at last, still hiding her face on her father's shoulder.

"He's off," confirmed her father, sorrowfully.

"What kind o' ship is't like?" sobbed Mary.

"Oh! a good vessel," said her father, assuringly.

"I must say a good vessel."

"And what kind o' place is't he has in't?" asked Mary, accenting the "he" very much.

"No bigger almost than our corn kist," answered her father, making her sit on one of his knees, while he put one arm round her, and gesticulated with the other. "You would wonder to see 't, it's no bigger almost at all than our corn kist; that is the place they have to stand in. On one side o' that there's two shelves, one above the other, that's their berths. George has the upper one, and the young man that's in with him has the under."

"What kind of young man is 't that's in with him?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"As to that I cannot say," answered her father.
 "I didn't see the lad."

What wouldn't Mary have given to know about the young man, and every other minutest particular of George's surroundings!

"And how long is 't he'll be on the sea?" asked Mary, her eyes closing with a shiver.

"About three months."

"Three months? What a weary time!" sighed Mary. "And what was it made him ever go?" she asked, after a pause.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Just the unsettled roving way young men have now-a-days. I would hardly have thought it o' George. It was hardly right of him to leave his father and mother, his father so old as he is."

Poor Mary! how little satisfaction she could get!

"How did he like the Bible?"

"Very much; it was a perfect beauty."

"I daresay he wouldn't care about the markers?"

"He did so; he seemed very proud when he saw them, and asked me to thank you kindly from him."

That was all that was to be got. Mary could hear no more. There was no definite message, no kindly leave-taking. It was so hard, so cruel.

Blackburnfoot rose, spoke tenderly and wisely to the sobbing girl, as old people speak to the young and untutored, and with a subdued sadness took his leave. It was like the day of a great, grand funeral to Mary.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

“Hame, hame, hame, hame I fain would be,
Hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie.”—*Song.*

FULL six months had passed. Mary was at home at the Blackburnfoot on the 30th of October, her seventeenth birthday.

Do not suppose, reader, that aunt Jane had yielded to her desire to go home as soon as school broke up in June. No. Many a conqueror having triumphed gloriously over his enemy, has thereafter permitted his allies and dependants to sink into dejection and decay—the soil unsubdued, the arts uncultivated, the uncared-for cattle languishing in the war-wasted fields, the heart-broken remnant of peeled and scattered families moping and pining in their desolated homes—but not so did aunt Jane. She thoroughly understood the point to be gained by warfare. She did not forget in the triumph over

her enemy, that her main object was the wealth, the aggrandisement, of her own house and name, not the overthrow of the enemy.

"If," she remarked, "a young miss is properly managed, she need never lose her looks. A young miss should be kep' on the top of things, dashing here and there, and knocked about till oncet she's settled. Forring travel's the thing. I can't tell you the young ladies I've known taken away and knocked about the continent to put such things out their heads. I know it's the thing, if I could manage it."

"It's impossible," said the weak Miss Catherine.

"It must be done, though," said the resolute Miss Jane.

Long before school broke up, her plans were matured. She would herself take Mary to London and Paris, having secured the companionship of Mr. and Mrs. John Hamilton, Mrs. Hamilton knowing the French language well. It was not in utter ignorance of the fact, that the Dunlops of Elnton and Mary's friend Miss Melville were to be in Paris during July and August, that she made such arrangements. The success of her plot was perfect, almost outdoing her success in sending Mary to school. The Dunlops had got all they had heard of her

prospect of great wealth fully confirmed; her appearance was lovely, her manners only a little simple and countrified. They constantly invited Mary to be of their party, and Mr. Alfred appeared entirely devoted to her. Aunt Jane trusted to great Time to bring all things right, taking care to be ever recurring to the fact of George's supposed marriage to Mirren Baird.

But to return to the afternoon of 30th October. Mary sat over some bit of work very listlessly, as if her thoughts were far away, when she was startled into consciousness by Bob's voice, saying in the kitchen,—

“Ay, it's an Australian ane, I ken the mark.”

“For your father,” said her mother, meeting her in the passage.

Yes, it was *his* handwriting. The life at her heart seemed to flow backwards as she stood and held the letter with a firm “grip.”

“Open and read,” said her father.

It was a severe ordeal; her voice shook and wavered, like her heart.

“DEAR BLACKBURNFOOT,—

“You will be glad to see that I am safe at my journey's end. You mustn't think, however,

that it has been all plain sailing. We had some very stormy times, and meeting a terrific gale just on entering the Gulf of St. Vincent, we were at our journey's end almost shipwrecked. By the most marvellous exertions, we were all got safe to land, on a desolate shore, some twenty or thirty miles under Adelaide. This was being saved in a very hair-breadth manner. It was Sunday, the 3rd of July, that is, it was like our 3rd of January here. The rain fell in torrents. What provision we had with us, was but some biscuits and a little rum. There were ten women with us, and twelve children; the women behaved admirably, but the constant wailing of the children was the most distressing thing I ever heard. The cold rain pouring down on them, with nothing to shelter them. I carried a little fellow across the country on my back: he never ceased wailing out, 'Oh, I wish I was back in Scotland! I wish mammy had stopped still in Scotland!' If I had been no bigger than he was, I would have liked to join him.

"We had walked some five or six miles, when we came to the station of a wealthy settler. They received us most kindly, and took the women and children into the kitchen, where the children were put to bed. We men were put into a great shed.

We kindled one or two bonfires, and they gave us some food, but you may think we were cold enough. In the night a young child died; we got a box for a coffin and in the morning its father and I dug a grave in the soaking wet ground. I put up a fence to keep the beasts off it. The mother, poor thing! was as grateful as if I had built a monument. She stood holding by the rail, and it was hard work to get her off. They gave us two waggons, and before night we all reached Adelaide. We lost little or nothing, as everything was got from the ship after a time. Still the distress of many after landing was pitiable. I have taken any sort of odd job to do, that I might share what I got with them. Any money I had with me has gone the same way.

“I had nothing with me at first but what money I had, and your little Bible. I tried to dry it at one of the fires in the shed that Sunday night, but I grieve to say it is a good deal spoilt. The markers got little harm, as I had them folded up inside. They put me so in mind of home, I was ready to cry like little Johnnie, “I wish I was back in Scotland.” The Blackburnfoot one was in at the 107th Psalm, and I couldn’t but think that it was like an omen, that I might escape all dangers

by sea and land, and see Blackburnfoot once more.

"It would be hard to tell you how different life is here from there. I have written to my mother, but please remember me to all old friends, and to your wife and daughter.

"Your affectionate friend,

"GEORGE HAMILTON."

Mary could not read through the letter—tears blinded her eyes, her voice trembled, her excitement was such her teeth chattered. Her father took it, and read aloud. The mother stood by, wiping her eyes with her apron, and remarking, "poor fellow," in so hearty a tone, one couldn't but think it would be sure to do him some good even across seas.

Mary rose and left the room. Her father sat silent, then said,—

"Was she so fond of him?"

"Well, I don't know; I wouldn't wonder."

The father's ideas didn't take the course the mother expected.

"That's the difference between men and women. Mary might be for settling down just as they were, to live on in the same way for ever. But all his

thoughts for the next dozen o' years 'll be to go about, and make his fortune. He hasn't made much of it as yet."

The woman's motherly pride was not a little hurt by the idea of George's setting light by Mary's affection. Scarcely could she refrain from explaining that she had very different ideas on the subject, but for once she remembered to be prudent. If she had resolved to be of the other side, why describe their tactics to the goodman, who was not only guileless as a child, but almost as fond of George as of Mary? Besides, she had never seen the thing look so objectionable.

What a world of thought was in the letter for Mary! George, her old friend and companion, without one farewell word from her—gone, so nearly lost and heard of no more.

How good he was, working at anything to help others, spending all his money upon them. Now he had none. Was it possible that he next might suffer from want? Perhaps be ill and unable to work; and who then was to care for him? Could they not send him a hundred pounds?—she still thought that a very great sum. The infant's grave she saw. How cleverly George would put up the rail—so thoughtful to please the mother. Then he

had wanted to cry like Johnnie, because he had left Scotland. Oh! why had he left Scotland?

All this time she didn't think how plentifully her own tears were falling, or what havoc she was making of her eyes, not till aunt Jane entered her room, seeking her.

"What's wrong with Mary?" said she, going to her sister in the kitchen.

"With Mary? nothing that I know of. Her father had a letter from George; did ye hear?"

"And what was in the letter?"

"Oh, very bad news. He's been near shipwrecked, poor fellow! and sore put to to keep himself and his friends in life."

"Any message for Mary?"

"No message to Mary."

"Nothing about her at all?"

"Well, he just merely mentioned the markers."

"What markers? What are the markers?"

"Oh, nothing," said her sister, feeling miserably that she had here most unnecessarily betrayed Mary, and her own guilty cognizance of facts. "Nothing; just the bits o' markers Mary put through the Bible her father gave him."

"Markers! Mary put through markers! Well, young girls now-a-days is the trickiest! Tell me

note quite stopped her breath for a few seconds, while the wondering Miss Catherine demanded an explanation. "That's what comes of not having everything of the stylishest ready at a moment's notice," she burst out at last.

"What comes?" persisted Miss Catherine.

"The day after to-morrow, and whatever's done must be done by the stylishest hands. It's not as if girls' work would do. Girls' work is always either a fluff and a slobber, or pinched like a nine-pin. It must be just the thing, plain but full, as tight's a glove, and as roomy's one's own skin."

"What must be?" asked Miss Catherine again.

"*That's* what it must be to be the thing," retorted Miss Jane, sharply, as if her sister were dissenting from her. "And it's perfect necessary to be the thing, if one goes into sets that's nothing but the thing."

"And where is it you're going, and what are you going to get?" asked Miss Catherine. "It's not as if we had the hands in the house now," she remarked, after reading the note; "but perhaps *I* could fit it on if you can't get better, and then we could both——"

"Not at all. It must be Mrs. Shapem or nothing, but I'll see to it instantly."

AUNT JANE GETS INTO STYLISH SOCIETY. 171

Since her return from Paris, aunt Jane had entirely dismissed her millinery establishment. It was but justice to Mary that her aunts should not so "demean themselves."

On Thursday afternoon aunt Jane drove out to Elmton, with Mary, Grace, and a French lady, whom she had not before seen. Her silver grey silk gown, was of the richest material and the most faultless fashion, on the whole ; Miss Catherine pronounced it "quite a hit."

Aunt Jane's sensations on driving within the massive gates of Elmton, seated in the elegant open barouche, under these bright soft May-day skies, cannot be set forth in plain black and white.

If Sir Bulwer Lytton ever gives to the world the process by which various states of mind and spirit are set forth by lines of diverse coloured light, (see a *Strange Story*), then may such sensations be perchance intelligibly defined and set forth in a brilliant chromatic scale. We shall see that a glowing red light sprang up and flooded her whole soul and spirit. It marked triumph, exultation, and delight, to be driving in so dashing a carriage, visiting at such a stylish place. Then a softer, blue ray, streamed alongside of it. Her own niece, the

possible future mistress of this stylish establishment, gave a quieter, blue sensation of intense home-satisfaction. Then a bright golden beam might be perceived to cross the other lights; she was lost in admiration of the money which purchaseth all things. But soon again the red light blazed up almost to the heavens, in a gush of admiring sympathy with the fine folks, born to dash about such places with horses and carriages, an unselfish fellow-feeling with "the quality," that had through life coloured aunt Jane's existence with we shall say *red*.

Poor aunt Jane, let us share her triumph! How many years she had picked up information from ladies'-maids, of their ladies' engagements and fashionable visitings, ruminating upon the fashion, the dash, the style, involved in such proceedings with all right and charitable feelings towards these her more fortunate fellow-creatures, and with no more hope of being herself a partaker in such bliss, than of some day paying a visit in company of the magician to Aladdin's wonderful cave. Well, here she was this May day, still in active middle life, dressed in an elegant silk, seated in a first-class carriage, visiting at a first-class country residence. I like for my part to contemplate the unlikely

gratification, of a seemingly hopeless taste. I perfectly sympathize with aunt Jane's desire, to extract all the pleasure from it she could, by rolling it under her tongue. It's all very well for such a child as this Mary Hamilton, all on a sudden opening her eyes on a great fortune, to turn away her head and say, "I would rather have the old way o't." The truth is that to her, there's no "old way o't." Life is as fresh as the springing grass on a March morning. If I had my Wordsworth by me, I could tell you how the outside world looks to such young things, by quoting *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*. Anyhow it's all new to them. A hayrick is not a plain hayrick, and tossing it out in the sunshine is not a heavy task, as it is to people come to their senses; there's a delicious romance in it. How strong is the idea of pastoral life in the healthy-minded young.

But I am wandering, and in the direction opposite to my purpose. Aunt Jane never had had such tastes, and it is her cause I mean to plead.

It's a very different thing for "miss" to be told that she's got a fortune, and that she must come in out of the sunshine; that she must this moment lay down that half-formed pat of butter, just where she stands in the dairy, with the cool softened light

him, and, in fact, declined a lot that Blackburnfoot could not but think was too good for him—though never was likelier lad than George!

Mary found a letter at home from George, of which she had never been told. We give an extract.

“I have a wooden house for myself, which I built chiefly with my own hands. Here I had a sore trial to my patience. After I had finished it with great labour—three nice rooms and a store closet—I wanted to fell a prodigious tree, not far from it for timber. You have no idea of the size of the trees here. The ‘preacher’s beech’ is a sapling alongside them. I felled this fellow one evening with immense labour, not dreaming of its being within a distance that it would strike my hut. Down it came with a tremendous crash; the top took my hut, and laid it almost in ruins. I had nothing for it but to begin and build it all up again, but it was a great provocation to me. I have laboured to have a garden—I want a garden to put me in mind of home—but everything I sow or plant, the kangaroo rats devour, and I haven’t yet fallen on a plan to prevent it.

“I haven’t told you that I went to the ‘diggings’ for a fortnight. One tremendously wet night, I heard

somebody singing wonderfully sweetly all through the night somewhere outside. It was a song, 'My heart's on the Rhine,' we all learned long ago at the precentor's class. It brought back old times to me so, he sang it so sweetly. In the morning I found a poor, delicate-looking foreigner; he had made a bonfire, and was striving to keep himself up. He was the singer, a German. I took him into the hut, and shared my breakfast with him. I found him good company, poor fellow, the rest of the time I stayed there, and I contrived to get him into a place here when I came. He is very grateful, and is an advantage to me, for he is very intelligent, and has some good French and German books, which I read with him, and learn to play the flute; anything to prevent a man growing a savage altogether. I have no books of my own, except your Bible, as I lost everything. The very look of that Bible is like home to me, and the markers talk to me about Stanecroft, Blackburnfoot, Boniton, Scotland, till I could cry like a child sometimes.

"I trust all friends are well and happy; I am very well. I can't say much for my happiness, but good health and constant occupation make any life bearable. The Granges are very kind to me, and treat me almost like one of the family. The young

ladies sing all our songs, and lend me any books I want to read.

“Remember me most kindly to your wife, and to Mary, if she is ever with you now. It seems very long since I have heard anything from home.”

Mary had no more the key to this letter than her father had, and so it came into her head to be suspicious of the three daughters, who sang songs and lent books, just as it had come into his. She sat gazing mournfully at the letter, singing over in her inmost thoughts, “My heart’s on the Rhine, on the Rhine,” as they used to sing it in the precentor’s village class. She remembered George telling her how much better she sang it than any of the others. Was it for her sake partly he had taken the foreigner into his hut, and shared his meals with him? How they came back to her, times when George and she stood together at that little class, often looking on one book. She went to the old book-shelves in her father’s parlour, and there she found the very book, the little yellow paper “complete songster,” with the leaves all coming loose. She carried it off as a sacred relic, and trusting that the letter wouldn’t now be missed, took possession of it also.

How much, and how jealously the poor girl wondered what like the three daughters were, what sort of

books they lent him, and how they sang their songs, we need not say. Certain it is she did wish very much that George could hear her sing now. Everybody said she did it well. She wished so hopelessly he could only see and speak to her now as he used to do. She had been such a silly, childish thing so long, long ago, no wonder he didn't care for her !

"He might have given me just one chance," thought poor little Mary, and great tears fell on the letter.

Before she left for Paris there was another Australian letter. The reader will excuse another specimen.

"Before this reaches you it will be about the end of May, and Mary will be coming home, if she ever comes home now, and if it is still home to her. She is seventeen and a half now.

"I am often weary of this place till my very life seems a burden to me. Then I think, What would Scotland be, or home as you call it? No more like home than this, everything changed so, you couldn't tell it for the same, except for the old, wearisome trees and hedges.

"Mr. Grange is still very friendly to me, and his wife and daughters very kind.

"But old Scotland for ever ! Oh, what would I

give to be coming up to the Blackburnfoot at the time this letter is coming! The old fruit-trees on the bank, all white with blossom, on a bonny May night in the gloamin,' the blackies and mavies singing like mad things. Then when I am standing on the big step at the door, Mrs. Hamilton comes across the court from the dairy, with a face shining for joy to see me. Once there would have been another behind her, but that couldn't be now. After all, life's a cheat and a weariness, and one thing's just as good's another."

The tone of the letter displeased Blackburnfoot. A roving, wearisome, unsteady temper it showed. Who would have suspected George of it?

Blackburnfoot wrote a letter full of excellent sense. It reprobated strongly the roving impatience and unsteadiness of the young men of the present times, and exhorted George to patient perseverance in well doing. "Come back, but not till you have done something to justify your ever going away. Come back, when I for one am in my grave, and live soberly and righteously on your own land, as your fathers did before you. Why do you talk of wearisome trees and hedges? Your great great grandfather planted these trees with but little pleasure or profit to himself. He little thought of a young

man coming up, when they were a credit and an honour to the family, to talk about them as 'wearisome.' It is a most unhappy temper, that, that despises and wearies of everything God puts easily in our way, and is always envying after things that are out of it. I can hardly believe it of you, you used to be so different. It seems almost impossible that your last can be written by the boy that used to follow me about the fields, taking such an interest in everything that was going on. First you weary of your home, till nothing will serve you but to leave your father in his old age, and your mother, and go off to a far country. Believe me, George, you will never be happy till you cure yourself of this temper. How it took possession of you, I know not, for I had thought very differently of you. Your father and I will not be long now, we cannot be, and you will be the last of our race. It depends on your life and steadiness, whether the lands of Stanecroft pass into other hands after they have been the Hamiltons' two hundred years. I would be woe to think of it, so you must excuse my plain speaking. If you could come back as you speak of, you cannot but know the joy it would be to us. But it has been otherwise ordered. I had expected that you would be there to see to my last journey, to see me decently laid among

the lairds of Stanecroft, and the Blackburnfoot. As you say, this world is a strange cheat.

"Mary is at home just now for some days. She is going to France with a good lady for the summer time. I am glad to have her in such good hands. She joins with her mother and myself in many kind remembrances to you, &c.

"JAMES HAMILTON."

Mary read over this letter, and looked up at her father with great tears in her eyes. It seemed to her very harsh. How differently she would have written! But Blackburnfoot was thoroughly disappointed, where he had placed a strong trust and affection. He had fancied a fine, manly young fellow George Hamilton of Stanecroft and the Blackburnfoot, his great great grandfather over again. He found a roving, whimpering, unsettled lad, reading French and German, and talking about 'wearisome old trees.' What wonder that the old man was disappointed, and inclined to be harsh?

It entered Mary's pitying little head, "I might write to him." But then she remembered her father's calling her "a young woman," and telling her to take care not to think of any one that wasn't thinking of her; and she felt it wouldn't be honest to

write to him now without telling her father. And how could she do that? But she did do it. She looked up again, and said, as if the words choked her,—

“Might I write to him, father?”

“I see nothing to hinder you, if you like.”

Here is the letter she wrote,—

Blackburnfoot, 20th May.

“DEAR GEORGE,

“I HAVE read all your three letters to my father, and thank you for your kindness in always remembering to ask for me.

“I have just come back from Mrs. Bright’s, and I am just going away again for the whole summer to Paris. Oh, George, if you weary where you are, you may well believe I weary of all this too. I cannot manage to get my father and mother to allow me to stay at home now, and aunt Jane is always sure to put them up against it. It looks so strange, often I think I will grow ill altogether for wearying to get home again.

“The Blackburnfoot is just looking as you say in your letter. All the flourish out, and the birds singing. It is so vexing to be obliged to go and leave it.

"You mustn't think my father's letter to you hard, or anything but kind, for I'm sure he doesn't mean it. It's just his way now.

"Oh, George, how sorry I am for you—far, far away in that miserable place. What took you to go away? I am very sorry to think of you wearying so much, and I am sure you wouldn't do it if you could help it. My father doesn't think what he's saying; he didn't mean to be hard. Are you not coming back soon? I'm sure you should, everybody would be so glad to see you once more. Oh, George, the old trees and hedges are not wearisome. You were wrong to say that, and it vexed my father. They put me so in mind of old times, often I could cry when I look at them. But old Baldy has gone and cut down the ash where I found the lamb dying that wild March night that you carried it home for me. I was vexed at Baldy cutting the tree. I hate changes from the old ways. Oh, what happy times they were! Is it not strange if they never, never come back again?"

"I am glad you were kind to the poor German. I mind the song well, and I have the very book we used to sing it off.

"I am glad you have friends who are kind to you. I fancy they will sing very well. And do-

you read many of their books? I must be done now, as I have written a long letter. Believe me always, whatever may be, your true friend,

“MARY HAMILTON.”

It was a long light May evening. Mary sat writing in her bedroom window, the tufts of milk-white blossoms on the old pear-tree trained round it looking in at her, till even that long twilight began to fade.

Bob was to go to Boniton to post the letters as soon as his duties were over. Mary came downstairs and laid her letter on the kitchen-table beside her father's. Her mother was alone in the kitchen; she came and looked at the letter as she laid it down, and with a half-approving, half-dissenting smile, said,—

“So you've been writin' to the lads, Mary?”

“Only George, mother. He's no lad—at least not to me.”

“Oh, I know that,” said her mother, thinking to be very prudent.

But through some accident in the precarious postal arrangements of a new country, Mary's sweet little letter never reached George Hamilton.

CHAPTER XX.

A STYLISH PROPOSAL.

“An’ often he thought, as he gaed through the glen,
She’s daft to refuse the laird o’ Cockpen.”

MARY returned from Paris just at the Christmas holidays. She was further fortunate in aunt Catherine’s having so bad an influenza cold, that aunt Jane could not in decency leave her alone to accompany her to the Blackburnfoot, but was forced to be content with sending some strict charges to her mother. But for Mary, I fear to tell the elegant reader how she conducted herself during this fortnight. A bright hard frost had set in, with a crisp sprinkling of snow not deep enough to threaten to starve the sheep by any means; but Mary made a pretence of it to go into the potato-house, and carry thence great red top turnips. These she made Bob cut in slices, and then tript through the glittering snow to scatter them to the sheep. This was very bad;

but there was worse than this. The long kail stocks were denuded of their curly leaves by Mary's own hands. Every crispy fold and cress was edged and tipt by dainty frost-work, and Mary left this work with her hands looking—how do you imagine? Then she set off, not walking and picking her steps like a young lady that had been two seasons in Paris, but running and capering like the collie dog beside her, through the glen into snow so deep, that she ought to have thought it impossible to go through it—through the glen and across the bridge, up the brae, to call for her old friends at Stanecroft. Of course that clever woman the mistress of Stanecroft and her girls presumed on this, and treated her with familiarity accordingly; and she, poor simpleton, instead of asserting herself, took the liveliest interest in all Miss Betsy's preparations for her dowdy wedding; offered her a loan of the winter dress she had brought from Paris, to take a pattern of for the cut and trimming of her merino. Finally, she asked them all to tea at Blackburnfoot the next afternoon, and set out again for home. She came round into the court in the darkening, singing in her beautiful voice that had been well cultivated in Paris—singing some old-fashioned Scotch song.

“Oh, Mary,” said her simple mother, meeting

her at the door, "the sight of you's heartsome; ye sing like a mavin."

Next afternoon the mistress of Stanecroft and her daughters reached Blackburnfoot, shortly after four o'clock. As they entered the court, Mary was standing waiting to lay hold of a pail, into which the lass was ladling a hot mash from the boiler, her father beside her, smiling as if she were engaged as properly as possible.

"It's for kickin' Jean," said Mary, catching the satirical surprise on the mistress's eyebrow; "I like to give her supper, she looks so pleased, poor beastie, she's never forgotten me."

Is the reader deeply disappointed to find our heiress so much what she was after full two and a half years' most careful training, mixing in much good society, learning to speak French almost fluently, to read German easily, to sing far above average for a young lady? So am I, reader, but I cannot help it. Has your experience in life been different from mine? When any one with whom we have been thoroughly familiar has been for some years separated from us, there is a natural fancy that we will find him, when he returns, altogether other than he was. We fancy him despising our thoughts and our ways, insisting on habits

altogether different from ours. Back he comes, and we believe that our expectations are correct. The air and manner, the tone of voice, seem all changed. "He is more changed than we would have thought," we say somewhat mournfully. But let the few first hours pass over, how he turns to his former self—to the same books, the same old memories as we do, every tone of his voice comes back as he speaks of them; how delightedly he turns to all his old ways, as if the intervening years had never been. Tastes deep formed in childhood cleave to us.

And my Mary—if you, reader, fancy there ever was anything *vulgar* about my Mary, I almost pity you. Belonging to plain, old-fashioned, country people, she was plain, old-fashioned, and countrified. About the fields, trees, and hedges, round the horses, the cows and sheep, over even the great stone boiler, with its bright cheery fire beneath, and its steamy rustic-smelling contents, hung a delightful charm she couldn't get over. But she was pure, sweet, gentle, and loving, as young girl could be. She had grown up in seclusion with her father, a high-minded, religious man, well up in life before she was born, and almost peculiar and fastidious in many of his tastes and ideas. It may be the class

to which she belonged is well nigh extinct now, even in Scotland, but there was once such a class there.

And having once belonged to this class, I fear we may find it a hard matter to make a modern fashionable young lady of Mary. I cannot help your being disappointed.

Not so was "kickin' Jean." She whisked ears and tail, snuffed with strong delight, with a little gracefully sulky undulation of her well-horned head.

"Poor beastie," said Mary, "how she knows me," as Jean thrust out her nose mou—mou.

Then Jean was content with meaner things, and fell to her hot supper.

About this time Mary was, as often as she could, finding pretexts to send Bob to Boniton, and after the ostensible message had been delivered she never forgot to go out after him and say, "And mind you call at the post-office, Bob." She had been disappointed hitherto, yet George might well have had time to have answered her letter. How could she help a little heart-burning, to think that she had written first to him, and he was not even in haste to answer her?

"Any letter from George?" asked Blackburn-foot of the mistress of Stanecroft.

"Oh, yes, a letter from George—we're sure of that every mail; George is none of your ne'er-do-weels." And she read an extract. "Mr. Grange's girls are very nice. One of them, Lydia, puts me much in mind of Eelin, the same round soft-looking girl. She is my favourite for that reason. She sings very nicely, which Eelin should learn to do too, and wears a dress I should like to see Eelin in. I must send you some money to get Eelin sent to school next winter for a time. As for Mrs. Bess, she has given us all the slip, and declares her education finished. Oh, mother, how fast the heart goes home! I could fancy just now I had come in from the stable to you all, in the old parlour, cross and crusty enough maybe sometimes. But oh, with what joy—I would kiss you all round at this moment, and set me down in the ingle nook." "And that's all I need read," said the mistress, folding the letter, and putting it back in her pocket.

Miss Betsy certainly looked at her mother with a questioning, disapproving face. But though Betsy was about to dissent from the church of her fathers, she did not dare as yet to dissent from the dictum of her mother. Some ray of light might have been in that letter for poor Mary, but if it were so she never knew it. What a night she had

of it, reading over and over again in her mind the extract from George's letter. Poor child, with what tears and sorrow she shut her eyes and hid them in her pillow, that she might see vapours to try and see the pattern of Lydia Grange's dress.

"He used to say he liked nothing so well as my pink short gown with the ruffles, but he's forgotten me quite."

Next day, with swollen eyelids, she took to all her country ways, for she said,—

"Though he wants Eelin sent to school, and to wear fine dresses, I like my old ways best. He was always kind to me then." In the afternoon she went to Stanecroft, for she took a sudden wish to see Eelin, for Lydia Grange, he said, was like her. It was the tenth day of Mary's stay at the Blackburnfoot. She was later than usual of gathering the greens, and during those ten days both her mother and the lass had got to take it for granted that she *did* gather the greens. Could ever aunt Jane have imagined things go so far as this? Her mother, poor woman, couldn't take it in, that there was any great harm in Mary "just goin' out, an' pu'in' two three kail-blades in our own yard." This is the danger of the guidance of the young being in the hands of those not qualified for it. But to our story.

Mr. Alfred Dunlop was very near the Blackburnfoot, ambling lightly on as nice a steed—He was very near the Blackburnfoot when Mary set down her basket, and fell to work to collect the required tale of kail-blades—so near he was, that finding no one in front of the house to whom he could give his horse, and riding round to the back, he had a full view of Mary, deftly stripping the tall kail-stocks of their curly leaves.

But things are often surprisingly overlooked. Some little circumstance may make them look so differently in the beholder's eyes from what we could have hoped. Aunt Jane here would have simply said, "We're disgraced for life," and would utterly have refused to believe in any middle view of the case.

Now the truth was that Mr. Alfred Dunlop had several times during the late frost seen his sister Margaret gather these very vulgar, nay, unnamable leaves, and carry them to some rare rabbits she made idols of at this time. It didn't occur to this unpractical gentleman that Mary was gathering the leaves for anything but rabbits.

Mary hearing the horse's feet looked up, and with all speed threw the leaves into her basket, and leaving it where it stood, tried to make her escape, while

Mr. Dunlop gave his horse into Bob's charge. But this couldn't be. Mr. Dunlop turning round "held her with his glittering eye," looking through the spectacles, and his rows of shining teeth, so that she couldn't move. He greeted her with great empressement. It was so long since he had seen her, he was so delighted, &c. Mary was bashful, blushing, and uncomfortably constrained. He thought he never had seen her look so beautiful. And oh, poor Mary! the conceited monster actually set down her little natural taken-abackness, as the—the—the downcast bashfulness of maiden love, and eyed her, accordingly, approvingly through the spectacles.

Mary made for the house with all speed. Her mother having seen Mr. Dunlop approach, had with rare presence of mind seized a huge shovelful of live coals from the kitchen fire, and sped with it to the grate in the new parlour. This was the reason of aunt Jane's injunction always to have the parlour fire good in the afternoons, which she, poor short-sighted mortal, had dared to disobey, when she saw that Mary was never there, let her have what fire she pleased. So now with fear and trembling she sped to repair her fault. It was a mercy she didn't meet Mr. Dunlop full in the face, shovel in hand.

But this was escaped, and Mary took Mr. Dunlop to the parlour, and then turned and came downstairs to beg her mother to be quick and come up.

"I'm not fit to see no person just now, Mary, but I'll sort myself before long. Go way up yourself, and don't affront the gentleman, letting him sit on that way."

"And my father, where's my father?"

"He's away up to the high parks to see the beasts."

"And Bob holding the horse," said poor Mary. "Jenny, do run and fetch my father; tell him I want him to come very much."

"Away up ye go, Mary," said her mother again. "You'll affront the gentleman a'thegither, leavin' him sittin' on like that."

Mary went. On entering the room she left the door ajar. Mr. Dunlop rose and shut it.

"Did you enjoy Paris as much this year as last?" asked he, coming back and seating himself beside her.

"No, I thought it very dull," said Mary, shyly.

She couldn't think why Mr. Dunlop looked so pleased, and laughed and opened his white teeth, and said, chuckling,—

"Ha! did you? rather a change from what it

was !” Then softened his tone and looked *under* the spectacles and said,—

“You may be assured, Mary, it was not you alone who suffered.”

Mary started—he had only once before called her “Mary.”

“I’ll go and see if my mother’s ready. She wanted to see you,” she said, rising.

“Pray don’t go,” said Mr. Dunlop, making her sit down again ; “things are so well as they are.”

Mary looked more and more distressed, Mr. Dunlop more and more delighted. The truth is, he had come to ask Mary to be Mrs. Alfred Dunlop, of Elinton, without having a doubt as to what her answer would be. His position as contrasted with hers, her aunt’s too laborious anxiety to make Mary attractive in his eyes, his firm belief in his own wonderful condescension in thinking of the thing, all made him sure that he would be most certainly accepted. True, she had once, when he tried to be a little soft, drawn her hand from his and run, but that was but the shyness of a school-girl. Even though she herself might care but little for him, her relations knew better than to allow her to refuse such an offer. So he scarcely felt a shadow of anxiety. His difficulty in the matter had been to make up his

own mind to so humble an alliance, but she was, besides being very rich, so decidedly beautiful, that he had got over that, so he imagined all difficulties were out of the way. Now her downcast looks made him fancy she really cared for him.

"I had rather some thoughts of asking to see your father," he said, after a moment's pause, "or perhaps your aunt if she is at home; that is, if you will allow me, Miss Hamilton."

"Oh, certainly," said Mary, simply, much relieved by the turn things had taken.

"But pray don't go yet," said Mr. Dunlop, "things are really so very well as they are."

Mary sat down again—she hoped that any moment now her mother would be in.

"I fancy I should rather ask your father's permission to see you, than yours to see him," said Mr. Dunlop, enigmatically.

Mary did not comprehend him, but sat looking down puzzled and bashful, not knowing what to say.

"You, you don't object to my asking to see your father?" said Mr. Dunlop, looking at her very hard through the spectacles.

"No," muttered Mary, more and more puzzled, and listening for her mother's footsteps with downcast eyes.

Is it altogether astonishing that Mr. Alfred Dunlop took this for consent enough on her part? And he stole his arm over her shoulders, and timidly kissed her.

With a shriek and a spring that certainly were rather more than civilized life contemplates as probable, Mary sprang from her seat, rushed from the room downstairs, and threw herself like an avalanche on her father, who, poor man, had just returned at Jenny's request, and was slowly making up his mind to see this stranger, as Mary had desired it.

"What's wrong?" he cried, seeing Mary's speechless excitement.

Mary only stamped her foot passionately, and cried,—

"How dared he!" then burst into a tempest of sobs and tears.

"Tell me, my darling, what he said," said her father.

"Now, Mary, just compose yourself, and tell what's wrong," said her mother, laying hold of her.

"Was he asking ye to marry him?"

"He asked my leave to see my father, and then—and then—" but the next fact put her in too towering a passion to admit of words.

"Well, an' you allow't that he might see your

father, and I fancy after that he had tried to kiss her," she added, in an explanatory note to her husband. "Was *that* it, Mary?"

Mary stamped her foot, and shook her head in impotent rage.

"I see," said the mother, sagaciously. "That's just like our Mary. But ye know, Mary, that's no way to behave. If ye like the lad and mean to take him——"

She was here interrupted by a passionate exclamation from Mary.

"But ye know, Mary, there was nothing in what he did much bye ord'nar'," said the mother, soothingly. She was anxious to see the thing well settled. She had been looking from the kitchen-window at Bob leading about the horse, and "raly he was a stylish-lookin' animal," and "all thing," she sagely conjectured, would be "stylish accordingly." Then there was the unmitigated wrath of aunt Jane to face; there was Betsy of Stanecroft's marriage to be eclipsed; on the whole, the mother was anxious to act as a peacemaker.

"Raly, Mary, I think ye should hear what the lad has to say; your father 'll speak to him."

"If you mean that you want me to marry him, mother, I'll die sooner. But you've sided up with

aunt Jane this long while!" And Mary sank down on the table, with her face in her hands.

"Now, Kirstie," said her father, firmly, "mind ye, I'll have none o' that. Mary'll marry nobody she doesn't like. I'll go and speak to the gentleman."

"Your father speaks to me," said her mother, as he left the room, "as if I was hard-hearted enough to force ye to marry any person ye didn't like; but I don't see why ye shouldn't like him—a fine, stylish-lookin' gentleman like that, dashin' on a horse."

"Oh, mother! don't you grow like aunt Jane, mother!" cried the poor girl, throwing herself on her neck.

"Me! my darling! me like aunt Jane! Though we're sisters, we're no more like other than if we weren't. Don't you think, Mary, you'll be made to marry any person ye don't like, either by your father nor me. No, though ye were to be an old maid all your days."

Meanwhile the unlucky Alfred Dunlop was in no enviable state of mind. His pride was hurt, nay, something like his affections were more disappointed than he would have believed. He would have given not a little to effect his escape. Then old Blackburnfoot entered the room.

"Miss Hamilton has probably told you I wished to see you?" he began.

"Yes, sir," said Blackburnfoot, motioning him to a seat.

"I believe, however, that her own reception of my addresses makes anything I might have to say to you as well unsaid. I can only express my own extreme regret if I have in any way offended Miss Hamilton, or seemed to take the slightest liberty; nothing was further from my intention."

"She's but young," said Blackburnfoot, apologetically, "and I believe I have to say on her part, that she's sorry you should have so thought on her, since she cannot so think of you."

This was galling enough; but what could be done? Mr. Dunlop rose, bowed, and said "Good-morning," went downstairs, got on his horse, and rode off.

Fearful was the rage of aunt Jane, when coming next day she found that Mr. Dunlop had proposed, and been so unceremoniously refused. Mary stood calm and dignified, the poor mother bent, battled, and wriggled before the fury of the blast, like a heavily foliated tree caught in a Lammas storm.

"Well," pleaded the miserable woman, "it was none o' my doings; there was a fire in the parlour,

and a' thing right, and I must say I did all I could to make her hear what the lad had got to say."

"The lad!" reiterated aunt Jane, indignantly. "Just the stylishest marriage in the county not even decently refused! There'll be nothing this season but a whispering and a tittering over that story in all the firstest circles."

It was uncontrollable emotion led aunt Jane to use the word "firstest;" she knew in her calmer moments that there was no such word, but she was in so great a hurry to express how very high the circles were, in which they were hopelessly ruined.

* * * * *

Mary's position at Mrs. Bright's was much altered this winter. Mrs. Dunlop no longer chaperoned her. She was left much alone, but this her strange perversity of taste seemed to prefer.

Even aunt Jane in time found some relief. She got invited to sundry tea-parties, where, if her entertainers apologized for having but a dull evening, she would ring out a little laugh, and say,—

"Oh! as for that I do assure you it's the same in all circles. There's nowhere you'll spend a duller afternoon than just with the Dunlops of Elmtou."

Then would her entertainers inquire whether she was often at Elmtou; whereupon she would shrug her shoulders, raise her eyebrows, and insinuate that "my niece, Miss Hamilton of Blackburnfoot, had rather shut the gates on us there at present;" then shortly would remark, with a little sigh,—

"Mary's a strange girl. She makes no more of refusing a county gentleman nor if he was some perfect nobody."

Then would her admiring listeners demand if the said Mary had refused the young laird of Elmtou. Aunt Jane on this mysteriously answering that she named no names, but this much was true, that "she refused right and left on both sides the channel, for she speaks French so perfect, it's all one in Paris as here."

By this time the reader may guess how, and with what wondering admiration, the maidens at this tea-party had fixed their eyes upon aunt Jane, eager to hear her lightest word. Refusing right and left in French and English, what young girl could but admire to hear of it? But all this went on in a "circle," to quote aunt Jane, so safely remote from the Dunlops and their circle, that when the bounce that made the mighty splash among them had spread out as wide as their circles could spread,

still their outer edge did not approach so much as the extreme limit of the Dunlops' circle, and so it was never heard of there.

So it came to the 20th of March—Miss Betsy of Stanecroft's wedding-day. Mary had promised to be bridesmaid, and nothing aunt Jane could say would prevent her.

CHAPTER XXI.

“OCEAN PARTS NOT KINDRED SOULS.”

“A flail, or what you will——”

Hood.

I FEAR I have wearied my reader with descriptions of days and scenes, but I much wish to call up before him the day that Mary set out with her father and mother, down the orchard, into the glen, going to the wedding at Stanecroft.

King Solomon has described it:—“Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”

The air still cold, is full of sunshine; everywhere is heard in the land the joyous voice of birds; “the *flowers* appear on the earth;” the leaf-buds have made but small way, but here and there on the earth buttercups and daisies are glinting out.

That's like our own old Scotland. How like it that ancient Hebrew land must have been!

The wedding at Stanecroft was to be late in the afternoon, but these friends went there at one o'clock, Mary's white robes having been sent on before.

As they went down the orchard Mary picked the "wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower," from

"Beneath the random bield
O' clod or stane,"

and as they crossed the little bridge, a patch of shining flowers looked up from a marshy nook with friendly greeting. She went to gather them, saying, "Blessings on ye, you're here again!" The uninstructed eye takes them for buttercups, but buttercups, dear reader, they are not. A shining golden flower that comes

"Spreading out its glossy breast
Like a careless prodigal,
Telling tales about the sun,
When we've little warmth or none."

When they reached the village of Stanecroft, the little children were sitting under the great walnut in the street making chains of dandelions. The tears started to Mary's eyes. "The days that are no more," were too strongly suggested.

In a rowan-tree beyond the old well a blackbird had set himself, singing of life and hope, of love and joy. He broke off and began again, with new sweeps, and swells, and bursts, for last time he had fallen far short of his idea.

Mary turned to listen to him as her father and mother went in. She stood listening, and looking on the well, and the trees, and the gate, all so familiar; then with a little sigh, "An' they don't sing there," thinking of the songless Australian birds, turned and went in. Then she went out to the back, and stood gazing at the budded branches of the great beeches and sycamores, and their light shadows twinkling on the sunny furrows of the red ploughed land. The songs of joy ringing through the air, and a strange sad response to them in her own heart.

"How I waste my life living as I do," she cried to herself. "How charming this is! Or *might be*," said the sad, strange inner voice.

The wedding-party was not large, but what was wanted in numbers seemed to be made up in good-fellowship and kindly enjoyment. Everybody was happy.

Mary thought it would be impossible to say that George was away, except by his mother. An

occasional look, a broken-off sigh, showed that she remembered him. And this was a tie that bound Mary's heart closely to her, in spite of all her old persecutions and unamiable speeches now.

"And when did you hear of Mr. George?" she heard Mrs. John Hamilton say.

"Last mail; we hear every mail; and he's well, and getting on well, and meets with kind friends. Oh, I think George is very comfortable."

This speech was studiously meant for Mary to overhear, as she did. His mother had no belief in her having any serious intention to prefer George, now she was so spoiled and made of, and the proud woman was most determined she should not think her son had as good as broken his heart about her, and been obliged to leave the country.

Alas for poor Mary's simplicity, such a thought had never occurred to her.

"Goodman," said the mistress, looking down the table, "Goodman, I'm going to propose a toast. Fill all your glasses. Here's to our son George, may he come back before long a richer man than he went, and may he meet with as good a wife as his sister has met with a husband."

Mary had to drink to the toast with the rest. Yes, and the mistress of Stanecroft eyeing her

maliciously as she did so. Mary's cheeks burned as she met her look.

Her father was appointed to reply to the toast.

"He hoped George would prosper. He had known him from his cradle. How he had loved him he needn't say. His leaving the country, he never could understand. This roving spirit he couldn't approve. Young men, what lay to their hand they should do with all their might, not run after every fancy. Riches, they might or might not be a blessing. He hoped he would meet some one who would be a help to him both for this world and the next. He had himself little likelihood of again seeing him here, he hoped to meet him there."

A deep sadness filled the old man's speech. Mary's tears were not to be repressed.

But now the minister thinking that things had taken quite too sad a turn, began a speech, in which he sought to set forth the happiness of the man who secured the prize that had been this day awarded to him; and as things had taken so grave a turn, his endeavour was to be as jocose as possible. Everybody laughed, and Mary, hoping not to be missed, slipped from the room. Wrapped in a plaid, she found her way across the court to the barn.

The birds were silent now, except when there came on the wind the sudden qua, qua, qua of a blackbird betaking himself to roost. The stars shone softly out. Mary stood looking over the closed under-half of the door on the farther side of the barn, looking at the sky, and the earth, and the leafless trees, now cold, and pale, and sad. The joyous sunshine and hopeful songs quenched and silent.

Then she turned to the sturdy flails that were standing against the wall. She stood in the pale light handling them tenderly and lovingly, and—forgive her, reader, she was but a country girl—kissed the well-polished handles which George's hands had so often grasped.

"Well I know ye, old friends!" she cried, hugging them to her. "And you, Gideon," she said, looking tenderly at the unwieldier of the two, "how he made you swirl."

George's old name for his flail called up before her the story of the angel messenger to Gideon's corn floor. She gazed wistfully out at the great tree near the open door. The angel sat under it. George threshed wheat on the floor like Gideon, and the angel had sent him far off out of her world and her ways for ever.

She bowed her head on her hands over the half door. The daisies and golden flowers she gathered in the morning fluttered down one by one, and fell softened and closed among the straggling straws on the broad steps outside. Mary heard her name called and voices talking and laughing lightly. She turned to join them when the mistress and her mother came seeking her.

"Here, I declare!" cried her mother; "what in the world brought you here, Mary?"

George's mother looked inquiringly in the fair face, shown faintly in the pale twilight, a gentle sadness about the eyes and the corners of the mouth, then put her arms round her, and said remorsefully, "Ye were never an ill lassie, Mary."

Mary clung to her; she never remembered her to have been so kind to her before.

"Eh, sirs! where's my braw son?" sighed the mistress, looking round the great dark barn. "His heart's with us all this day, I warrant ye; he knows it's his sister's wedding-day, but there's nothing heartsome like, now he's away."

But the young couple were about to drive off, and Mary must go and see them leave.

She went to the room where the bride was putting on her bonnet. Betsy put her arms round her,

and looked earnestly in her face, and taking upon herself to speak as an authority on such a subject, said,—

“Mary, believe me, when we marry we should follow our affections, not notions of genteelity or grandeur.”

Our honest friend Betsy had become so sincerely attached to the dissenting minister, she utterly forgot that “genteelity” was the first cause of his being preferred to the excellent John Forrest.

Mary turned away from her searching look, and said,—

“I’ll never marry, Betsy, so you needn’t speak to me.”

As Mary walked home through the darkness with her father and mother, she fancied there was a mournful ‘sough’ in the wind, an unusual plaintive tone among the fir-trees, on the brae above the glen. Her spirit was sad. Stanecroft without George was like a body without the soul.

CHAPTER XXII.

TELL-TALE BETSY.

"I mind it weel, when thou couldst hardly gang,
Or lisp out words, I choos'd ye frae the thrang
O' a' the bairns, an' led thee by thee hand."

Gentle Shepherd.

BLACKBURNFOOT's fears as to a lawsuit had not been permitted to go to sleep. Another threatening letter from his neighbour Gilbert asserted that the water of the black burn was so poisoned that his cattle were pining and dying in the fields ; he had already lost two,—and that he knew how to assert his own rights. His friend the lawyer treated such letters lightly, but advised his taking an opinion of counsel, as a means of setting the matter finally at rest.

"An opinion of counsel," explained Blackburnfoot to his women, "an opinion of counsel, that's what old Stanecroft took before his great lawsuit with the Duke."

"An' he beat," said the good woman cheerily, "so it's likely a good sort o' thing to take."

"It's just to see if you have a good case or a bad."

"Well, but if they can put you in the way to beat?" said the hopeful woman.

"Opinions of counsel is taken in Edinburgh, I fancy," said aunt Jane.

"Of course. Stanecroft went there in the end of 1788, and he was there again at the great decision in the spring of '91. Three years of such work made an old man of poor Stanecroft, and his son was laird by '96. If it killed him at fifty-eight, what chance have I, over the threescore an' ten."

"Over the threescore and ten! Away wi' ye! An' your birthday was last week."

"It's all one, my woman; I'm a dozen years older than Stanecroft was, and it was nothing but the Court o' Session killed him."

Yet the consciousness of sympathy with his forefathers in all their trials and persecutions, to follow step for step in their footprints, soothed Blackburn-foot, as nothing else in this world could.

"My great-great-grandfather, too, went into Edinburgh on the same errand about the spring of 1730. It's a fate on the Hamiltons."

"Oh, it's a genteel place, Edinburgh!" cried aunt

Jane. "Most old families has been in it on all sorts of errands."

"Very sorrowful errands they always were, took our family into't. The hornet's nest! Law, law, win or lose, it grinds the life out of a man. Old Stanecroft's business looked more trifling than mine at first. Williamson, the Duke's tenant, wanted to cut 'a few sticks,' as he called them, in the March hedge; they were hurting his corn. The 'few sticks' was a row of fine plane-trees; those, I fancy, that George means when he speaks of 'the same wearisome old trees;' so the lawsuit might have been all spared, if his great-grandfather had known ——"

How often Mary had sat while old Stanecroft detailed to George every step of the great lawsuit from '88 to '91. She had never wearied of such narrations, for George was listening too. She had heard all with a vague thankfulness that the younger branch of the house to which she belonged, had never been of consequence enough for the Duke to "take notice of them." She had a sense of security in the fact that the Blackburnfoot lay further up, and less in sight than Stanecroft, out of the way of the Duke, who was supposed to have an Ahab's eye on every man's vineyard at all within ken. This had

been her childish belief, listening eagerly to whispered stories and broken-off hints between her father and old Stanecroft. With them it was a necessary hereditary belief, but while they had often scarce half trusted what they said, Mary was giving it a whole-hearted faith, and fearing and trembling accordingly.

Then George had called all such ideas in question. Had hinted that the celebrated march hedge lawsuit of '88-'91 was a question that might have been contested between any two proprietors. The tenant had been the mover in it, the Duke had something else to do than plague himself about every petty field within miles of his palace. If Blackburnfoot did get into a lawsuit with Gilbert, it was the natural quarrelsomeness of a troublesome neighbour, and the said neighbour having raised an absurd question, would certainly have the worst of it.

George's bold avowal of such views had enraged and grieved Blackburnfoot not a little. Perhaps from that day he had a feeling that he was not just the young man he had taken him for.

Mary held by the opinion of her father, and looked yearningly after George, hoping that he would soon repent himself of not believing as his

fathers had believed. Yet his disbelief in such secret persecution gave her a grand sense of security. But now her father had to take an opinion of counsel. What could George say to that? Why was he not there to help them?

There was a tea-party at Stanecroft next evening. Mr. and Mrs. John Hamilton were there, and the young couple, the young bride looking very well and very happy.

"So you're like to get into law, I hear?" said the old laird.

"I fear it," returned Blackburnfoot.

"A bad business—a very bad business—I can tell you."

"The trial of our race, laird; we've all had the one enemy to fight."

"I can't see how you'll prove that. We had to defend ourselves from the oppressions of the great, but if you poison the water for a man's cows, you can't expect but you'll hear of it."

Stanecroft was jealous of Blackburnfoot's supposing himself of consequence enough to get into a lawsuit with the Duke. He had been accustomed to have him look up to himself as a man of great consequence, and of many experiences, which he could never hope to share. He was but of the younger

branch, and that younger branch had deprived the elder of the lands of Blackburnfoot.

"I have at least good reason to believe that a coal-pit working at the Blackburnfoot, may be very distasteful to His Grace."

"Oh, for that matter, it's distasteful to everybody," said the old man. "I don't in the least wonder at Gilbert's making a noise about it. If my cattle were drinking the water just under it, I would do the very same. I don't see that you have a shadow of ground for thinking that the Duke knows anything whatever of the matter."

Poor Blackburnfoot! to have his one consolation knocked so completely from under his feet.

"Well, at least you'll allow there's no exact saying what he's in, and what he's not in."

"I grant that," said Stanecroft, "and this I say, if it is the Duke, he'll take the lands from you."

"It's hard to say," said poor Blackburnfoot, "but my lawyer thinks I may have to take an opinion of counsel."

This was treading too closely on the honours of his house to please the laird, and he made no remark.

"This I say," he repeated, authoritatively, "if it is the Duke he'll take the lands from ye. What he tried with us was unjust oppression, here folks

are only defending their rights in not getting the water destroyed for the cattle for a whole country side."

"How destroy the water?" cried Blackburnfoot. "Our own cows drink the water before Gilbert's. How should they be well enough if Gilbert's are poisoned?"

"It's all one what you see," said the laird. "It's plain enough they are. Two of them have died."

"And how do I know what they died of?"

"That's plain enough," persisted the laird, "and they'll take the lands from you, and so the Hamiltons have lost the Blackburnfoot."

This selfish view of the subject was sufficiently irritating to Blackburnfoot; but having been his lifetime accustomed to reverence the laird as the head of his house and his senior by some twelve years, he kept his temper. He was in truth so much consoled by the laird's appearing to have come round to the idea, that the "Duke was at the bottom of it."

"There's worse things than the loss of lands, laird," he said, shaking his head mysteriously. "We mustn't forget that the strong can throw the weak in a dungeon, if his liberty's troublesome to him. Laird Somer's fate may be mine."

"Ay, they caged him," chuckled the old laird; "they kept him out of the way very nicely."

"I believe," said Blackburnfoot, his belief growing strong as he talked on it, "I believe they wouldn't stop at such a thing. They may run me into endless law expenses, then clap me up in gaol because I can't pay."

The dissenting minister—who had not very long left college, where one of his last acts had been to make a speech in a debating-society upon the matchless blessings of living in a free country, upon which he had gone on to say that in England every man's house was his castle, and how Scotchman and freeman were, he might say, synonymous terms, and thence expatiated upon his own perfect freedom of thought and speech, pointed with many contemptuous allusions to the state of literature and the press in a "sister country," where the people were, whatever they might think, "slaves in a somewhat high state of civilization"—the dissenting minister could stand no more. He therefore blew his nose aloud, set himself back on his chair, and thus began,—

"It seems to me, my dear sir, it seems to me you forget that we live in a free country, where the humblest is as secure of the protection of the laws as the mightiest in the land, where Majesty herself

couldn't imprison me a day without showing me the reason why."

The old laird looked at him with a particular, distasteful turn of the lips.

"I don't, of course, *know* the facts of the case," began the minister again. "I say I don't *know* the facts of the case, but was it not perhaps carelessness and waste, drunkenness perhaps, and in short good-for-nothingness, that got this laird Somers into gaol instead of His Grace?"

There was something so intolerably assumptive of the force of reason, of presenting the matter so forcibly yet so calmly, as gradually to convince his listeners: so much, of debating societies, of colleges, in the speech. Doubtless he had made a statement pretty close to facts, but stated so offensively, how was that to be admitted?

"He was a man," thundered the laird, "as far superior to most men now-a-days, in *whatever profession*—" but he paused and got no further.

His daughter fearfully interposed to silence her husband, fearing a coming storm. But he having got to talking upon "things with which he was acquaint," instead of the incessant uninteresting country topics, was not to be stopped. So clearing his throat, he went on,—

"I have no particular reason for supporting the aristocracy, but I must say it seems to me that the aristocracy of this country are as fine a class, as little likely to stoop to any underhand dealing—in fact I must say I'm rather a friend to the aristocracy."

"You should make that known publicly, they would take it a great honour," laughed the old laird, contemptuously.

The dissenter was silenced and looked terribly angry. Betsy got as red as the fire. Her husband always provoked her father; that was the thing of marrying a real learned man, plain people didn't understand him. Mrs. J. Hamilton, good-naturedly wishing to keep the peace, said softly,—

"Your opinion may be perfectly just in the general, Mr. Bryson, and yet there may have been exceptions, especially you know in the last century things may have been very different."

"She's at it, she's at it!" cried cousin John, rubbing his hands delightedly. "It was some time in the last century, an' things was clean different. Od man, she hits the nail on the heid just in a moment."

She had helped cousin John wonderfully. For very long he had not believed in these mysterious fears for the duke, but he never ventured to say so

to old Stanecroft. To admit that it was all true in the year 1788, in the dark ages, was the very thing.

"That which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been," said Blackburnfoot, solemnly. "Oppression and wrong are as old as the world, and while the world lasts the strong'll oppress the weak."

"You're right enough there," said the old laird.

"Country folks is so ignorant of the world," said aunt Jane, addressing the scholar, "everything puts them in a taking."

"Well, there can be no doubt that the city life enlarges the ideas and strengthens the mind."

"Oh, it enlarges the ideas wonderful. If people go on living in the country, they have no more notion of what's what. They come to think that if some noble has a castle or a palace near them, he's like the Queen on her throne, instead of that really, in some circles in cities, nobles is very little thought of. For instance, there's the Dunlops of Elmtoun, when I spend an afternoon with them, what with having a country estate, which is a genteel thing, and mixing in the highest circles in cities constant, they have a style and an air that of course if they were always in the country they could have nothing of."

"There's no question of it," said the dissenter. "I was born and brought up in the city, and I must say I'm proud of it. It gives a—a—in fact, a higher intellectual standing."

"It's well when everybody's pleased," said the mistress, dryly.

Betsy looked piteously at her mother. Her obvious distress had silenced the old laird some time since.

"And the forrin' travel opens the mind wonderful," added aunt Jane.

Here the dissenter could not keep pace with her.

"Well, perhaps, I believe in some cases it may. Still, when a man is thoroughly educated, and mixes in good intellectual society in one city, it makes him as it were a citizen of the world. Scholars feel themselves at home everywhere, and as they say Latin is the language of learned men, so that they're never at a loss."

"Latin!" exclaimed aunt Jane; "there's little style there I should say. The French is a chatty, stylish language, I must say, but after all foreigners is foreignera. Where will you get the style that goes with the English? When the Dunlops and us were going about Paris, my! to see Margaret Dunlop

and Mary Hamilton pass the black-avised French girls. It was like people of fair different quality.

"Ay, it opens a man's mind a bit to see the Versailles," said cousin John, who since aunt Jane's statement that "the forrin travel" opened the mind, had taken in nothing else, but sat till now pondering it.

"It's just rather too much for me," said aunt Jane, "it's just rather overly. To, have streets of rooms every one grander than the other, till it would take a carriage and pair to go through them."

"Well, that's a manner of speaking," said the dissenter, "but when a man's seen Holyrood, or say the palace here, he may easily fancy other palaces, even if something larger."

"Something larger! My stars!" laughed cousin John, rubbing his hands.

The dissenter got much nettled.

"A thing that astonishes a country man like yourself, to one who has seen a good deal, and read and reflected, may come all quite natural. A man accustomed to draw inductions from facts of which he has already a knowledge, to compare less things with greater, and to speculate on probabilities, may almost be said to have seen things that take the common run quite by storm."

"Take my word for't, ye havena' seen the Ver-

sailles," chuckled cousin John; "but instead o' all that college talk, if ye read the *Arabian Nights* ye might come nearer't."

The dissenter being rather set down by what common people had seen, was angrily silent, not, however, convinced that the debating societies of his native city did not comprise some of the first intellectual forces of the present age, which age he doubted not was most eminently superior to any former age.

"After all this grand opening o' the mind, I see no great difference anywhere," said the mistress, in a tone meant to be down-setting, to those who boasted of having their minds so enlarged.

Cousin John stared a moment till he collected his ideas, then said,—

"Oh me! who expects that a man'll change much at my time o' day? But I have't a' in my heid, a' in my heid, for a' that. It just gives me an idea of things in general. But look at her, my! she's just made off the pattern o't a'. I ay wondered how she came to be what she was till I saw't. She's just made off the pattern o't."

Mrs. John fell into so hearty a laugh at this compliment, no one else could make any ill-natured remark.

The bride came and laid her hand on Mary's shoulder, saying,—

“Come with me, I want to show you a present I got.”

Mary followed her along the worn passage to the best bedroom. Betsy turned to shut the door, and came forward with a silence and deliberation, as if she had some communication to make. She took a letter from her pocket, which she put in Mary's hand, saying,—

“I want you to read this, I think it's only right. I may do what I like with my own letters, now I'm a married woman. It's from George. Be quick ! or they'll be all out on us.”

Mary, so commanded, could not steady herself to read so soon as Betsy wished. Betsy with good feeling turned away, pretending to arrange matters in a drawer, and not to observe.

Mary made out at last that it was a long and kind letter of congratulation to his sister on her marriage, and that he had enclosed a bank-note as a wedding gift, then it went on,—

“Betsy, if you know now what it is to love, you may perhaps be able to fancy what it is suddenly to have the love taken out of your life, to be parted from all that made happiness to you. Driven out

into the world without a thing to hold to. But oh, you can't know ! you haven't loved him as I loved, it's not possible. He hadn't been like the light of the sun to you. He hasn't trotted beside you, and looked up in your face a little child. You haven't filled his lap with nuts and honeysuckles, and led him by the hand past bits he was frightened for, and lifted him over dykes and ditches. You didn't go through the glen in the wildest nights, to get sitting beside him and helping him with his lessons. He wasn't like a rosebush that you had planted, and watched, and waited on, and just when the roses—Oh, Betsy, pity me and pray for me, but I'll never be the man I was. I can hardly promise you I'll ever come home, you don't know what the old place is to me. I see her before me wherever I go. Here everything is strange, and it doesn't come to me so clear, but among the old roads, and trees, and hedges—I never forgot her a moment, her face looked round the corners at me, out of the barn-door, in the stable, everywhere.

“I am not to see or speak to her. She's to be, likely *is* by this time, another's. I *cannot* stand it; maybe you think I should be ashamed to say it. I never spoke to you so plainly before, but now I think you will feel for me, and in this lonely place it seems

so pleasant to have a friend, a real friend, who understands what I *am*, and not only what I appear to the people here. I know I may trust you, that you will not show this letter to Bryson. I couldn't stand that, burn it, and let nobody see it. I have a pleasure in writing to you, for just now I think you will feel for me, and I want to make you sure that I didn't go away and leave you all, because I was a good-for-nothing, heartless fellow, but because I *could* not stay longer. I may come in time to be able to come back again, but never the man I might have been. And, Betsy, if I should never come back, remember how I suffered before I was driven to go away, and don't think hardly of me."

Mary sat on a trunk by the window, leaning her back to the wall, looking vacantly at the dingy old brown hangings on the bed. The angry rebellion of a romantic urchin who was loath to leave the soft May twilight for his couch, came clear into the darkening, low-roofed room, the creaking clank of somebody drawing water from the great well. Mary needed the sounds of every-day life to be sure the letter she held in her hand was not a dream.

"It's me, it must be me, and yet it might be Mirren. But it's not to call a glen to her house,

and she never went with him so much. It's me."
Then the words—

"We twa ha'e paidl'd i' the burn,
Frae mornin' sun till dine,
But seas between us braid, ha'e roar'd,
Since auld lang syne,"

came singing to her. She heard George's voice, and the voice of a young girl she knew long ago that died of consumption. All the voices that had been dearest to her seemed singing it. These national airs linked with their poet's words, are so ingrained in the Scottish mind, it seems often from some association, as if the very air breathed them.

"What do you think of it, Mary?" asked Betsy's voice, with a true, embarrassed, real-life tone of anxiety and doubt, that made Mary start from her dreaming.

"Think of it," she repeated absently; "who is it he means? Who was he so——" and she broke off.

"Need *you* ask that, Mary?" asked Betsy in a hurt tone; "of course, if one's resolved not to see——"

"It wasn't me?" said Mary timidly, anxious to hear a perfect confirmation of what she felt herself from one who knew.

"To be sure it was you; who else could it be?"

Mary rose and stood leaning on the table in the dark little window, shaded by the rowans heavy with their fragrant blossoms, looking on the old well, a sad, vague feeling of remembrance and regret weighing heavy at her heart. He was so kind to me, so good to me. How could I let him go and never see him?

"Oh, it was cruel of them to say he was to marry Mirren Baird," she burst out.

"Who could say that? he hardly ever spoke a word to Mirren Baird."

"Oh, Betsy, I wish it may ever come right now."

"That lies with yourself whether you wish it."

"No, no," said Mary, mournfully; "often what's done can't be mended, let us do ever so."

"No doubt you'll have to do something, to show you care for him. What should hinder you to write to him?"

"I did write, and he's never said he got my letter. He's taken some ill will at me."

"Because he thinks you're all for riches and grandeur, and want to be done with him. Will you let me write to him? But mind if once I do, if you draw back, it would be an awful sin you had done."

"No, don't write," said Mary, not noticing the last part of her sentence; "never say you showed me the letter." She shrank from the thought of allowing Betsy to write anything she chose about her. "Promise me, don't you ever say you showed me that letter; I'll write something to show him I care for him without that."

"Well, see you make it plain," said Betsy, firmly, "for he's got it so into his head that you're all for grandeur and fashion, and that your friends are set on your marrying some great, rich man, he was too proud to see you or speak to you. And oh, Mary! I'm sure he's so in love with you as never was."

"There's nobody like him," said Mary dreamily; "I never saw anybody that could be compared to him; and he was so good to me."

"We'll see what they're about, for I must say I have no great notion of young girls' private chats," said aunt Jane's voice in the passage.

Betsy speedily pocketed her letter, and was found ransacking the open drawer. She had a dread of her mother knowing what she had been bold enough to do, though she *was* a married woman.

"Not done searching the house after your property yet, Betsy?" asked her mother, proud to show

aunt Jane they had other things to do than running after her niece. Mary understanding dimly that they were all going away, took refuge in speechlessly putting on her bonnet and shawl. Betsy's assured, life-like talk, of George's great love for her, and the light way she looked at her doubts and difficulties, had sent such a tide of happiness welling up in her heart, her lips couldn't form themselves to a common word. "Like the light of the sun to me." "Like a rosebush I had planted." "Her face looks round the corners at me." And Betsy's "He's so in love with you as never was," were rhyming through her mind, till everything outside of herself and her charmed thoughts looked like a dream.

Aunt Jane marked the quiet of her air with satisfaction. Mary found this dull enough. No doubt she would now see the difference from the stylish people and ways she had been mixing with; she would come to see who had been right. And Mary the hypocrite stood as quiet as one of Madame Tussaud's wax people, with such a kingly joy possessing her as we poor mortals seldom know.

"Ah, Betsy," she whispered, lingering behind the rest, "you're so kind to me. What would I ever do without you?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MAY MORNING.

“ Harde is his herte that lovith nought
 In Mey whan all this mirth is wrought,
 Whan he may on these braunches here
 The smale birdis singin clere
 Ther blissfull swetè song pitous.

* * * *
 And than becometh the grounde so proude
 That it wol have a newè shroude,
 And make so queint his robe and fayre,
 That it had hewes an hundrid payre
 Of grass and flouris Ind and Pers.”

The Romaunt of the Rose.

EARLY next morning Mary was in the garden : every green thing was transparent yet, when the lambs frisked in the sunshine, light shadows fitted beside them over the tender grass ; the white lilies nodded in thick-set bunches ; the monster peonies lay bowed down by the weight of their glory ; hidden March violets and waxen double primroses were still to be found ; polyanthuses of every colour were in per-

fection; and what a glory was over everything to Mary! She went round the rosebushes, gathered the clear young shoots and shiny waxen leaves in her arms, pressed her lips to the crimped leaves, and whispered, "I was like a young rosebush to him:" then stood back to view the bush as if she would see new, hidden beauties in it she hadn't before discovered.

Next she went to the white lilies. Kneeling beside them, she gazed on their glittering petals, sparkling in the sunbeams, gathered them to her, and said to them,—“I was like the light of the sun to him.”

Then she picked primroses and violets to put in her hair. Ah! if he loved her, her head was worth the decking now. So she walked about, the sun shining on her fair young head so full of happy fancies. She could have sung, only she was so happy! So with smiles breaking from her lips and eyes, she walked about rejoicing with rejoicing nature. The birds were singing enough for all.

Aunt Jane came suddenly on her. She was peering round the old-fashioned flower-borders.

“Have you been picking flowers to set out the house?” she said, glancing at Mary’s hands. “I

thought of getting some, but it's no use. There's not a thing here fit to put in a room."

"Just look at this young apple-tree, aunt Jane," said Mary; "only see what a load of blossoms, so pink and white!"

What great difference was there between the young apple-tree and a rosebush? She liked to look at it. Had she been anything like that in George's eyes? All aunt Jane's remarks passed in by one ear and out by the other, as they say—a state of mind most irritating to those engaged in the ordinary affairs of life.

"Yes; it's very full of flourish," said aunt Jane, scarce deigning a glance at it. "How dowdy and mean the Stanecroft house looked last night."

"Yes," said Mary, absently; with the delightful sensation of hiding a brimful joy, she smiled and chuckled to herself to think aunt Jane knew nothing of.

"These old-fashioned country-folks," continued aunt Jane, "have seen their day. The world's left them fair behind. Whatever they may think, they're thought nothing of now-a-days."

"I like old-fashioned country-folks, and I don't care what the world thinks," replied Mary, the joy of her heart dancing in her eyes, and in the gladsome

tones of her careless speech. Aunt Jane looked at her, and said pettishly,—

“When will you be a woman, Mary? You’re always just like some light-hearted, thoughtless lassie, that there’s no use speaking a sensible word to on any subject. You’ll be nineteen come October. Many girls are as down-hearted as possible if they haven’t some good prospects of being properly settled by that time. But a summer morning’s quite enough to turn your head at any time, and so you give no proper thought to nothing. There was Margaret Dunlop trying to make up to you the other day, and you should set yourself to think seriously if you mean to throw away such prospects for ever.”

Mary was not to be driven into angry retort this morning. She was in love with all the world, even with aunt Jane. She only looked her through and through, with such a depth of a smile in her eyes, breaking in dimples and fitting blushes over lips and cheeks, as an inhabitant of some star where only joy was ever known, might come down and look at some careworn mortal he could not understand, and longed to see break into gladness like his own. Having given aunt Jane this impenetrable look, she “ran yblithe,” as old Chaucer describes

himself going to see the daisy, to see all the summer sights round the garden, or rather to get rid of aunt Jane, for she could bear no speech but her own blessed thoughts. "Like the light of the sun to me," she whispered, and went into the deep shadow of the wall to try how it was out of the sunshine, then came back and thought, "He couldn't think more of me; I must write—I must write." But in such a tumult of joy, she couldn't settle to write just yet. Then she must tell her father she meant to write. She couldn't bear anything with even the appearance of concealment, and her father might look as if she was thinking of some one that wasn't thinking of her, but now she knew how he loved her, she didn't mind that. Presently her father came out, and set himself to plant young cabbages. Here was a good chance to speak of writing. Mary went to help him to set his string line even, and to hand him the plants.

"Surely it's a long time since you wrote to George, father?"

"It's three months, I warrant, but it's hard to get leisure at this time of year; and this lawsuit——" but even her father's look was lighter, it was such a charming morning.

"I might write to him, father, and just say

you're busy, but that you'll write when you have the leisure."

"No; I must write myself. I have the lawsuit to tell him about. Nobody could do it but myself."

Her father's look and tone were troubled and care-worn again. Te whit, whit, whit, cried the chaffinches, among the apple-blossom. Mary's shyness melted away in the joy of her heart, and she persisted.

"But it's just time for this mail, and I could write and say we're all well, and always glad to hear of him, and I needn't mention the lawsuit, and you can write about it when you have leisure."

"Well, there's no use writing without mentioning the lawsuit; it's just what George would take an interest in. But if you write a line to say we're well, you may just mention that I have probably to go into Edinburgh to take an opinion of counsel, and that things in the meantime look as bad as possible. Say I'll write more fully myself."

Mary Hamilton to George Hamilton.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—

"I CANNOT help writing to you again, though I have never heard from you since I wrote last;

but then you are always so mindful, writing to my father, and letting us all know how you are, and what you are doing.

“I am so anxious to know if you are wearying as much as you did, and if you still think it as dull. I hope you will come home soon now. We all weary sore for that time. Oh, George! do you think the old place looks like itself without you? I went to see your barn that evening of Betsy’s marriage. Gideon was in his corner. I took him in my hands, and thought of the times when you had him in yours. He is as heavy as ever, but not so glossy and bright as when he was yours. But if ever you saw a dismal-looking place, it is the barn, and, indeed, all Stanecroft, without you! I think your mother and my father felt it nearly as much as I did. My father made a speech about you—I couldn’t help crying. Your mother came out and found me in the barn. She looked up and down, and sighed, and said, “Where’s George?” I was just thinking that.

“Standing holding Gideon in my hands alone, in the darkening, I took such a thought about the angel that came to Gideon’s threshing-floor. Oh, George! surely if He sent you away, He will bring you safe back again. I pray con-

tinually for your safety. Oh, surely you will be safe!

“You are learning a great many things from your friend the German. I have learned a good deal, too, for I thought you would like it. I can speak French pretty well, and read easy German, and people say I sing well. You told me to learn all I could that night, three years ago, walking from Stanecroft to the Blackburnfoot. I wonder if you mind that as well as I do. You told me to try and give up speaking Scotch, too, and I have always tried since then. And I will not do any kind of work you wouldn't like to see me do, any more. You didn't like me lifting the ricks of corn, or drawing the water that day, at Stanecroft. Oh, George! how long it looks since then! And yet I am just what I was then. I wonder if you are?

“My father has got another letter about the lawsuit—a terrible letter,—written by a lawyer, some perfect rascal, my father thinks likely. He is very down about it. You will know how it vexes me to see him so vexed, and you not here to help him. Oh, George! what made you go away? I'm sure it wasn't heartlessness or carelessness! He is to go into Edinburgh, to take an opinion of counsel,

and you know, George, that was what the old laird had to do, and that just broke his heart. If it was only the loss of the money, I wouldn't mind. Oh! if the good old ways and the dear old times could come back again! You know I never liked the changes, and I like them less and less. My father says he will write himself and tell you everything, but he is too busy just now.

"It is summer here, George, but it will be winter times with you. Surely it cannot be that, when I am thinking happy thoughts about you, any evil thing should befall you! I can only pray for you, and hope that you may soon come home.

"With best love from all, believe me ever, my dear George, your affectionate

"MARY HAMILTON.

"The Blackburnfoot, May 22nd."

Mary read over her letter. Had she said too much? Aunt Jane would, no doubt, think it quite horrible; but then Betsy had warned her to take care that she made it plain if she cared for him—and did she not care for him? What had made every one else so ungainly in her eyes? What had cast a shadow over her home, once so bright and faultless? What had seemed to change the very face

of nature to her? That George was like the light of the sun to her, and that he had left her daily life. And now she knew how he had loved her, her love for him burst into a new life.

Late in the evening aunt Jane met Bob upon his errand to Boniton, and on the pretext that Mary wanted her letter to make some alteration in it, and that she would herself take it to the post-office next day, got it from Bob's hands.

There was a fate on poor Mary Hamilton's letters —George never got this one either.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAWFUL HEIR.

"If you are not the heiress born,
And I," said he, "the lawful heir."

ANOTHER year had passed—it was May-time again. Mary had heard nothing of her letter to George, and strange, Betsy had never again, in all that time, mentioned his name. For many months he had not even written to her father.

The question of the lawsuit had been set at rest, by an opinion of counsel, given most decidedly in favour of Blackburnfoot.

* * * * *

It was a longer walk than old Stanecroft had attempted for many a day, to go through the glen, and climb the steep orchard of Blackburnfoot, but he was aided and abetted by the mistress and a trusty staff. Mary saw them from the window.

"Father, there's the laird coming up the brae ;

poor old man, he can scarce 'sprauchil' up; I thought ay he had a warm heart to us."

She came bare-headed to meet them, a very embodiment of kindliness, innocence, youth, and beauty.

"You'll best rest here, laird," she said with gentle solicitude in her face; "there's a nice seat here, under the big saugh."

The laird turned aside, and set himself down under the saugh, and while he recovered breath, took long furtive looks of Mary as if to find excuses in her manner or appearance for a rooted unfavourable prejudice.

"Ye say there's a nice sate here," he chuckled out, "as if I didna' ken the sate weel, long before ever ye were there."

Blackburnfoot came now with joyful greeting. Nothing could have honoured him more than this voluntary visit of the head of his house. The laird made room for him beside himself. Mary sat on the bank at their feet.

The manner of both laird and mistress was so constrained, Blackburnfoot found conversation hard. The old man looked right up the linn, where a dull wreath of smoke rose above the "plantin' taps," obscuring the golden light of the evening sky.

“The pit gangs briskly on, I fancy?”

“As you see,” said Blackburnfoot, penitently.

“I hate the sight and the sound o’t.”

Old Stanecroft fell to laugh immoderately.

“Ye’ll hate it waur by an’ by, wha kens, ye’ll hate it waur.”

“Ye haven’t heard anything?” cried Blackburnfoot, terrified for further proceedings in law.

“I don’ know, folk’s ay hearin’. What wad ye say to this paper?” he said, taking a paper, yellow, nay gray, with eld, from his pocket.

Blackburnfoot put forth his hand to take it.

“Na, na, haud a wee!” cried the old man, “gripping” it close; “I’ll get my specs an’ read it out.”

“I, George Hamilton, laird of the Stanecroft and Blackburnfoot, having by my settlement, which I made on the tenth day of December, of the year of our Lord 1669, provided for the disposal of my estate in the case of my death, and having now taken better thought of the means of accomplishing my purposes, have come to resolve to alter the same settlement, to the effect and in the manner after provided.

“Forasmuch as it concerns me to see, that while my two sons are duly provided for, to the best of

my power and their deserving, the name and fame of my family should, if it please God, be preserved and maintained by him whom nature has made first; I hereby declare that my younger son John's right to my lands of the Blackburnfoot, conveyed to him by my settlement, shall be restricted to the solum thereof, as the same is hereby restricted, and I hereby dispoise and convey all metals, mines, and minerals in the said lands of Blackburnfoot to my said son George and his heirs for ever, with power to work the same.

"Yet the said George Hamilton, or his aforesaid, shall not so work the said mines and minerals, as to grieve or hurt the said John Hamilton and his aforesaid, or without leave or consent from them obtained.

"And this I do, not from want of love or affection for my son John, but that, if it please God, the house and name of Hamilton may be preserved in the earth.

"GEORGE HAMILTON.

"*Stanecroft and Blackburnfoot,*

"*March the 25th, 1670.*

"MATT. BROWN, W.

"JAMES WATT, W."

"Where was it found?" asked Blackburnfoot.

"Ye know the old chest o' black oak drawers with the secretar' top?" replied the mistress. "Betsy said I had promised her a set o' drawers, and these drawers she got away wi' her. The minister took to dustin' an' rubbin' out all the pigeon-holes. He had pressed on some forgotten secret spring, out sprang a little small drawer, and threw this paper on the floor at his feet. It's lain buried there, I warrant ye, since the day it was signed."

"Let me see the paper," said Blackburnfoot.

The laird held it, looking suspiciously at him, then thought better of it, and put it in his hands.

"It's Matthew Brown, the schoolmaster's hand o' write, there's no mistakin' it, and Stanecroft's signature, and James Watt's, all as they are in the larger will, and the paper anent the burying-ground," said Blackburnfoot.

"And that makes the coal yours?" asked Mary, laying her hands on the mistress's lap, and looking up in her face with a sweetness might have moved a nether millstone.

"So it seems, Mary lassie," said the mistress, not altogether untouched.

"Are ye tryin' to pick holes in't? It's a grand subject for the law," said the laird, irritably, as Blackburnfoot sat poring over the long-lost paper.

"God forbid that I should have a wish to pick holes in any just deed o' my forefathers," said Blackburnfoot, "It was, maybe, a rational arrangement; the Blackburnfoot had belonged to the head o' the house."

"And you've begun the works o' your own will and pleasure," said the mistress, "and so you've put it out o' your power to object to them."

Blackburnfoot gazed mournfully down on the beautiful linn, the pride and glory of himself and his fathers. After all they had been but tenants of the surface, owning only the peel of the orange, as the laird had before twitted him with. He knows little of *lairdship* who thinks that might have sufficed him. The possession of land is proudly held to reach from the centre to the height. Like the tower of Babel, its top reaches to heaven, while, unlike that tower, its foundations are laid in the abyss beneath. To be permitted to tenant the mere surface soil is a shallow ownership. Such loss of hereditary rank was so sore to Blackburnfoot, that truly it did his heart much honour that he sought to pick no flaw in the home-made deed of his long forgotten ancestor.

Mary stole to his side, and laying her arm over his neck, looked long and wistfully at him, the

slanting light playing over his broad high forehead and grizzly hair, flecked by the shadows of the flickering leaves.

"It's not the money," she whispered low, "but the lands that were your own. It's no wonder you're vexed, my darlin'."

Her father drew himself up with that proud seeming setting aside of all human sympathy, that a strong man shows when his trial is such that he feels it can be between himself and his God alone.

"God's will be done," he said firmly; "what an old fool am I to be vexed at having only the surface; I'll be done wi' that by an' by, and they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

He rose and walked away, the mistress saying something about bearing no malice, but Blackburnfoot was apparently unable to take in things immediately present. The loss of rank was very sore, one fear, perhaps, being that it would furnish a pretext to there being no place for him in the family sepulchre.

The laird looked under his eyebrows at Mary long and keenly, anxious to justify himself in his dislike.

"And you've been runnin' through a power o' siller this three year past, I'll warrant ye."

"And it was yours," cried Mary eagerly, as that fact first broke on her. "Will you give us time? will you, laird? and we'll try to pay you."

"Pay, Mary, lassie!" cried the mistress with something of shame. "Awa' wi' ye! No, no, by-gones are by-gones. It's puir policy for any family to beggar their connexions."

"I kenna'," said the laird shrewdly, "I kenna';" some vision of getting possession of the surface as well as the bowels of the Blackburnfoot crossing his keen thought.

The two old men in this hour furnished an illustration of what is surely true, that while old age ripens, almost glorifies the godly man, the mere worldling shrinks in to be but a horrid caricature of what may once have been himself—the beautiful or the gloomy beginning of a glorious or a fearful consummation. Truly there was once a day when Stanecroft would have scorned the part he now acted.

The mother having made all things in-doors ready for her visitors, went to seek them in the orchard. Mary ran to meet her, and to tell the history of the paper that had taken their wealth and given it to the Stanecroft family.

The good woman looked sore stricken, then said,—

“And your father, where is he?”

“He’s away somewhere, he seemed not to care to be beside anybody.”

“Was he any way broken down like?”

“Oh, mother, it was eerie to look at him,” and Mary’s tears burst forth at last, “he took it sore to heart.”

The mother turned to seek him. She found him in his parlour gazing right before him with a look of dull pain. She closed the door, came and looked in his face, and locked her arms round his neck. Our homely, sonsy, good wife, she felt in heart just like the old Kirstie Burns with the “gimp waist and the genty way o’ workin’.”

“Is it like you, James Hamilton, to take on so about a thing that’s no’ worth your mindin’?”

Hamilton disengaged himself from her clasp, and rising, looking grand under the dignity of a heavy sorrow, said,—

“You don’t suppose it’s the money? You don’t think it’s the things your sisters think so much of? But when a man and his fathers for generations back have never doubted that their land was their own, theirs to make a kirk or a mill o’, to find out

that it was only the surface soil, that even that there was scarce the power to sell—”

“Most provokin’,” said the good woman, not yet comprehending the true grief; “but still you know there can be no doubt the outside’s the best o’t. The more’s the pity it has any inside at a’,” she added, the heavy provocation of the mistress seizing on all the consequence she had acquired by the coals rising to her mind, yet most faintly, as compared with the desire to comfort her husband.

Blackburnfoot smiled in spite of himself.

“Oh, Kirstie woman, I’m not the man I was when I sat in your father’s parlour. I rather thought myself somebody then. Your father’s farm was only a lease, and mine—mine—you see it was only a lease too.”

“Now, goodman, I’ll put up wi’ no such nonsense,” cried Kirstie, brushing away the tears her husband’s crushed tones brought to her eyes. “Ye’re the laird the same as ever you was, only forget that that coal’s in your lands at a’, an’ where’s the difference?”

* * * *

Meanwhile the laird finding that Blackburnfoot did not return, and little anxious that he should, rose to go; Mary carefully assisting him in the

steep descent, he looking all the more sidelong and suspicious at her. She saw them over the little ivy bridge and then turned back. She sat on the orchard bank, buried her face in her hands, and mused. The coal and ironstone and all the wealth were George's, not hers. It seemed to set him at a great distance from her, to make her shrink down into insignificance beside him. He said I was like "the light of the sun to him; if he's so rich and I'm poorer than ever I was, will it matter to him? Do I care more for him now? Could I care more for him?" Her heart answered so unwaveringly "No," that self-sympathy would be indulged in sobs and tears. "If he hadn't sixpence in the world," went on self-condolence, "he would be just what he always was to me; and if he had 'rich Peru and all its gold,'"—poor little girl, her Dr. Watts's hymns had given her her own definite notion of what vast wealth might be,—"he couldn't be no more. And aunt Jane 'll not can gibe at him now he's as rich as Mr. Dunlop, or may be richer." And joy that the coals were George's, not hers, took possession of her, for which keen self-reproach followed as she called up her father's grief-struck face. "I wonder if he knew that George said I was like a young rosebush to him, if he would be so vexed?"

CHAPTER XXV.

BLACKBURNFOOT'S DREAM.

"I'm wearing awa'
To the land of the leal."

THE long lost home-spun restriction on the larger settlement of the ancient laird of Stanecroft and Blackburnfoot was pronounced by the lawyers an irrefragable title to the Blackburnfoot minerals. Whether Blackburnfoot, on the plea that he consented to such minerals being worked only on the understanding that the profits were his own, might not attempt to put a stop to the works, was perhaps a question. It was no question to Blackburnfoot. Put a stop to works that he had consented to for his own profit, simply because the profits were to go, not to himself, but to the head of his house? Never. Sorely did this view of the case irritate aunt Jane. Not only to receive so readily a musty old paper, written by a stupid old man nearly two hundred years

ago, but not even to use the power that was granted to protect his own property from being "perfect ruined," for she suddenly took that view of the case—to enrich other people, no, not even to try to make them pay a goodly sum for his permission, if permission was to be had.

To all this Blackburnfoot turned a deaf ear. The same perfect uprightness and simplicity that had marked him all through life were to go with him to the grave.

The mistress of Stanecroft did not take her sudden accession to wealth so humbly as her cousins at Blackburnfoot had done, for, as she said, "When one's all ready but the wealth, it comes quite different from when it falls to poor dowdy cratures."

Very handsome were the gowns and bonnets worn by Miss Eelen and her mother, when, in a commodious carriage and pair, on hire at Boniton, they proceeded to church. The laird too was there, still in a tailed coat of dark green, brass buttons, and stockened shanks, a shadow of the lairds of Stanecroft and the Blackburnfoot, that had frequented this old church for two hundred and fifty years. And what gave firmness to his proud bearing as he walked through the kirk-yard, was the reflection that of all these lairds, each so proud in his day,

he was the wealthiest. Yes, and the Blackburnfoot, of which they had been sheared for many generations, had "fallen in" to him at last. Not for twenty years had Stanecroft been seen at church—for, twenty years before, the church had been re-seated—and he looked upon the breaking up of the old worm-eaten boards, and moth-eaten cloth, as a shocking sacrilege. And most atrocious, his front gallery sittings were curtailed, though by energetic efforts he had preserved their position relative to the Duke's seat. Now his fine figure, appearing in his ancient place, made the young people stare, as at something old-world and fantastic, and the old people start at the memory of more stately times, when lairds were lairds, and humbler folks took an under position, with a better grace than now. It might have been observed that when the minister, in simple Scottish form, said, "Let us pray," the laird graciously dipped his chin, doubtless in unconscious imitation of a certain Royal Duke, who once, when on a visit to His Grace of Boniton, in answer to such exordium from the pulpit, said audibly, and with infinite graciousness, "By all means."

The blessing pronounced, while the body of the people resumed their seats with awkward haste, or snatching their hats scuffled through the passages,

the laird "kept his feet," and his "keeping his feet" had the true air of stately ceremony. There was a time when some representative of the Duke at least, if not the Duke himself, would have occupied his seat. Now there were but the family Bibles. But the laird could still stand and face round to the seat in courtly fashion, as he had in former times awaited His Grace's gracious acknowledgement of his silent courtesy. It was in truth in his eyes the crowning portion of the services of the day.

The humbler town's-folk lingered in the kirk-yard, to see this relic of the good old times as he passed.

"He's a splendid auld man," said one.

"He's the thrawnest body," said another.

"He's gotten an awfu' siller," said a third.

"An' he'll haud a grip o't," said a fourth.

The Blackburnfoot family left the church quickly as if desiring to escape observation. They passed through streets of weavers' houses with hushed looms, and took the short cut through the fields. Suddenly a figure, strange yet familiar, brushed up to them with glad greeting.

"Maister Paterson!" cried the mother, and Mary blushed and smiled, for his looks reminded her of happier days before George had left his home.

"I'm so glad to see you back again," she said, holding out her hand.

Alick could not know that that meant that, in the abstract, she was delighted to see that any one who had been so long away could return so like his former self, and he was pleased and flattered by the kindly welcome.

"I was just going to see you at the Blackburnfoot, it's almost three years since I have been hereabouts."

"And where have you been?" asked Mrs. Hamilton.

The young man blushed.

"I have been in the north with an old grand-uncle. He sent for me to go and live with him. I was always his favourite, and he—he's left me his heir."

"His heir!" exclaimed the mother; "and that way you'll can live like a gentleman, an' not do a han's turn."

Her triumph over aunt Jane and Mrs. Simons in having seen at once what a "gentlemanny young man" he was, was now complete.

"I've gone into a writer's business in town; I can't say I fancy utter idleness."

"Right, right," said Blackburnfoot; "and who

knows when riches take to themselves wings and flee away."

"I heard," said Alick, encouraged by this allusive speech, "I heard how your minerals had been so unjustly taken by another.

"Not unjust, by no means unjust, only not as we thought it had been."

So they talked on as old friends talk, for Alick seemed now like an old friend, till they at length reached the Blackburnfoot. At length—for Blackburnfoot's step and air had undergone a change in Alick's eyes much greater than his wife and daughter could see, and his progress was slow and feeble; he had acquired a habit of standing still to talk. Besides he talked more than he did formerly, and there was an eagerness and excitement in his manner quite new to Alick, who had not seen him for three years.

Alick and Mary were sitting in what was still called "Mrs. Simons' parlour," when the mother came in hastily, with some great sorrow in her face.

"What's wrong, mother?—what's wrong?"

"It's your father, there's something far wrong wi' him, his heart's goin' like in threes, an' he's far through like."

Mary ran to him. Alick set off for Boniton to send the doctor.

"Mary, there's something strange come over me: lay your hand here."

She laid her hand on his heart, which beat in threes, stopping between.

"Your mother says I'm to lie down and see the doctor; and, indeed, I feel scarce able to stand."

The doctor came and looked grave. Mr. Hamilton must not excite himself, must avoid exertion, must take wine and everything nourishing; but he took none of the violent measures that call out the fears of the ignorant. Mrs. Hamilton, poor woman, hoped there was little cause of alarm.

Mary sat beside him through the afternoon.

"Read me the Philippians, Mary."

Mary read; the beams of the sun striking heavy on the white window-blind, the flies humming drowsily behind it.

"What I shall choose, I wot not, for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."

Still she read on. How could she be so calm? How strangely far off the world and all its cares looked! How near and real "the land that is very far off!" Almost she could have thought this white

window-blind, steeped in sunshine, was the only screen between it and them.

Her mother stolé into the room and turned an anxious face to the bed. The stillness, the sunshine, the unearthly words, quite overcame her, and she turned and went out quietly, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron.

The kitchen and the "lass" were a refuge from thought.

"I think there's not much wrong wi' the goodman, just a sort of a qualm come over him. It's just good nourishment he needs, no doubt he's gettin' a little aged. I'll see if he'll take his bit steak." She busied herself dressing and serving up "the bit steak" as it might have been dressed and served for a king. "You wouldn't think I had been cryin'?" she said, turning back with her tray.

"Oh, no," replied Jenny, doubtfully.

"It would never do to look as if we *thought* there was anything much wrong," said the hopeful woman; "he'll just be himsel' in a day or two."

"Now, goodman, here's the bit steak the doctor spake o', done to a turn." She called eagerly through the door as she reached the top of the stairs, anxious to chase away the eerie unearthliness of the chamber before she entered it again.

"That's right, woman," he cried, eagerly; "and I'm feeling just a different thing—oh, a great deal better; I must be up."

"Up! no, no. Lie still, an' you'll just be yourself to-morrow," and her smiles brought the tears to her eyes. "An' if ye wouldn't mind the sunshine, maybe Mary would draw up the blind."

"Put up the window, Mary; I would like the air, and as your mother says, draw up the blind, I like to see out."

"Oh, that's charming," said the good woman, as she busied herself about the invalid's dinner. The fresh air, the unchecked sunshine, and the song of the birds coming through the open window, made her feel right again.

As he sat up eating his steak, talking eagerly, livelily, and hopefully, the mother declared she hadn't seen the goodman as cheerful "this many a day."

Mary saw an eager excitement in his manner she wished much to check, but how to do it was the difficulty.

"Come, mother," said she, coming in, "you need your tea now; I've got it ready—come away. You could sleep, father, if you would try."

"Well, I dare say you're right, Mary; I do feel wearied a little."

Mary patted up his pillows and gave him a kiss, drew down the blind, looked back at him, and shut the door. In an hour she came back with his tea. She had been reminding her mother how the doctor warned them against exciting him.

"Well, well, Mary," said the poor woman, with a very touching reproachfulness in her manner, "if ye think I encourage him to hurt himself, I'll stay back till he bids me come, but mind ye, tell me when he asks for me."

"Is it you, Mary?" asked her father, waking up as she entered. "It's you," he said again, as she went to draw up the blind. "What o'clock is it?"

"After eight o'clock."

"Oh, Mary, woman, I've had the pleasantest dream I ever had in my days. Set down these things a minute, till I tell you about it. I've seen my father, just as plain as I haven't seen him these five-and-forty years. That shows my memory's better than it was. I haven't seen my father as plain in a dream for more than forty years. I met him coming out of Boniton there, and I said, 'Father,' said I, 'we had better take the short cut through the fields;' so we walked on through the fields by

the stiles, only the stile wasn't as you know it, but the way it was some forty years ago, a narrow hole left in the fence, and my father said he would have to jump it, and I helped him over. And we went on and on, but the fields were so green, and the whole thing was so pleasant, you never saw anything like it, there was such a pleasantness about it. I had some idea I would tell him about the coals, but somehow it went out of my head. There was the strangest pleasantness about it all, the green fields and my father walking along."

"What should set you dreaming about wandering with your father through green fields?" thought Mary, as she looked at the delicate flush on the face grown so fine-looking under the white cotton nightcap, and the tears started to her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FUNERAL.

“And brought him, and buried him in his own sepulchre.”

BLACKBURNFOOT rallied before long. He was able to go, taking Mary with him, to assist the mistress in fixing on a site for the new house that she and the laird had resolved must be built, and built immediately, on the lands of Stanecroft. George had so often talked the matter over with his mother on their evening strolls, when “the new house” looked like a “castle in the air,” that she knew well how he would have it placed. All the summer through, the building of this house animated the laird with a new life. He never quitted it, but might be found quietly watching, or peremptorily directing, every hour of the day. He seemed to live only for “the great work,” as he called it.

Mary scarcely heard of George. In vain she watched for a letter to herself or her father, or for

any acknowledgment of hers. He had gone, they were told by his friends, to the "diggins." He was well, but his letters were mere notices of his being so. Even they knew little of him. His mother rejoiced in the fact of his well-being, and trusted surely that their letters communicating his succession to this great wealth would bring him immediately home. Poor Mary, she got cold looks and indifferent words from all of them, even from her friend Betsy. Now they never would be pleased with her as George's wife. And how could George always treat her letters so? Many a bitter tear our poor little Mary shed. And so the long summer and autumn months wore away.

* * * * *

The old laird died suddenly in the beginning of November. On his funeral day a light fall of snow covered the earth, but Blackburnfoot would walk to Stanecroft. Not all his wife's entreaties could persuade him to drive round by the road.

"I'll go through the glen. My father went through the glen to his father's funeral, and I'll go through 't to his."

Mary and her mother went with him, to sit with the widow.

"Ay, I mind it like yesterday, I could scarce

be six years old. My father took me in his hand. We went through this very way, but there was no bridge over the burn then. My father took me on his back and carried me across. I mind the young laird's look as chief mourner. He was quite a man, but not near so fine-looking as his father had been. I fancy George is more like what he was. Oh, stop ! take it slow, the road's very bad !”

“Terrible bad,” said his wife, laying hold of his arm to support him while he stood talking with pale lips. “It's most fatiguing.”

She tried to believe that the road was enough to try any one, but before she got him to Stanecroft she could scarce keep from crying.

“And his feet, so wet and so cold they must be in this slush. If he would try not to stand and talk so long at a time,” she thought, but forbore remonstrance. After all he seemed to be getting on as fast as was possible for him.

* * * * *

As the hearse moved away along the snow-covered village-street, she looked eagerly from the window after the walkers going behind. Now she saw her goodman walking among other men, how broken and feeble he looked ! Could he go even so short a way ? She broke into a hearty fit of weeping,

then tried to make herself believe it was "all about nothing." Of course for many of the last years of his life he would be feeble, as the old laird had been, but she must be patient and make up her mind to that. So she dried her eyes, and spoke to Mary with a strong effort at cheerfulness.

Blackburnfoot walked with the funeral the short distance to the little graveyard with much suffering from exhaustion, but uttered no complaint. They had planked over the ditch to the high bank opposite, and up this sloping bridge they carried the coffin, up the field and through the white gate. The door of the little octagonal tomb was open. The laird was to be laid in state in one of the niches.

"George's place'll be here, I trust," thought Blackburnfoot, as his eye rested on the next place, "and surely I'll be laid there beside my father."

Old Stanecroft had at one time threatened that he would have no more of the Blackburnfoot people laid there, but George would never deny him this just right.

The laird was laid in his last resting-place, and the mourners moved out, and locked the door, Blackburnfoot the one true mourner, among them.

"It's a dreary bit that," said cousin John, with a big sigh of relief as they came out among the humbler outside mounds, the edges of brown leaves sticking up through the snow sprinkling that covered them.

Blackburnfoot brushed away the snow from an old fallen-down tablet that had been erected to the memory of the laird of Stanecroft, who built the tomb, while his coffin filled a niche inside. It still bore the name "George Hamilton," and the date 1693. He brushed away the snow and the big, lagging, dark-spotted leaves that for another summer had fluttered down from the great sycamores and fallen on this old tablet. He pored over it, and said calmly, taking up cousin John's words,—

"It shouldn't be so dreary. It's the last resting-place for us all, and surely there's another and a better world."

"Oh, nae doubt, nae doubt," said cousin John; "but a man's kinna eerie ways at the thochts o't. After all," he went on, beginning on a key more congenial to his tastes, "after all, though he's awa', I will say the laird was a hard man. I think I never most kent as hard a man."

"Let the dead sleep, John Hamilton; we have all our faults. I always respected the laird; he was

the head of our house. If he was a little high-minded it was, maybe, only what was natural. I have a wish now to live to see the new laird home again safe and sound. The place has been the Hamiltons' more than two hundred years, and he's a 'George Hamilton' again."

"Ay, I would be loth to see that minister chap get a grip o't," said cousin John, stretching his neck to catch an unloving glance through the trunks of the sycamores, of the Rev. Mr. Bryson in the road below, turning away towards Stanecroft.

"God forbid!" said Blackburnfoot solemnly. "George may be on his way home by this time; may He preserve him in perils by the sea and perils by the land."

Blackburnfoot leaned against a gravestone and groaned heavily.

"What's like wrong?" said cousin John, catching at him, much startled.

The old man groaned, bowed together, very pale and cold. Cousin John shouted aloud to the others to come back. Two who were still within hearing came.

"Give a hand here, and we'll carry him down out o' this."

The three men carried him down into the road,

spread an overcoat of cousin John's on the snowy bank, and placed him on it. The doctor had been at the funeral. He had left his gig at Stanecroft, and was now coming in it returning. He drove the sick man and cousin John to the Blackburnfoot. Then he and cousin John supported the old man into the house. And Blackburnfoot crossed his threshold from without for the last time for evermore.

When Kirstie Hamilton had seen most of the mourners return, she went to meet her goodman to give her arm to help him on his way. He and John Hamilton were still behind. It was quite natural that they should stay behind; besides, she knew before, that he could scarce get through these roads. The road was perfectly quiet, the wheel-tracks and the prints of the mourners' feet sharply defined in the snow, and the afternoon setting in "snell and dour." She reached the planking up to the burying-ground; still no sight or sound. She crossed and followed the track up the field to the white gate, and looked fearfully over to see if her husband and cousin John were still loitering among the graves. The ghostly silence of the glittering white-peaked roof looking through the leafless sycamores,—and set off by the tops of the dark fir-trees

behind, laden with broad patches of white on their extended arms,—the cold air, crept to her heart, and she turned and made quickly for the road. A gig came along with the mysterious noiselessness of wheels on snow. "The doctor's gig and the doctor not in it," she thought to herself; but she was now too uneasy at not meeting her husband to take her usual kindly interest in her neighbour's affairs. The gig stopped suddenly after having passed.

"Hollos!" cried the boy.

She turned round.

"You're Mrs. Hamilton, are you not?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, this is Dr. Allan's gig, and I was to take you home as fast's possible."

"And what's wrong? Tell me quick what's wrong?" cried the impulsive woman, running to the gig.

"He's pretty far through," said the boy pityingly, "but you know it's maybe just been rather cold work for him. The doctor was giving him a drop brandy. Try an' keep up your heart." And he handed her carefully into the gig, patting her shoulder kindly, turned his gig, and set off at full speed.

Poor Kirstie sat and wept with terrible heartiness, then suddenly dried her eyes and said—

“I’ve seen him terrible far through like, when I think there wasn’t so much wrong wi’ him. The doctor doesn’t know his ways so weel ’s I do.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A "FLITTIN'."

"She turn'd and she lookit,
"She thocht the dear place she wad never mair see."

Lucy's Flittin'.

BLACKBURNFOOT was laid inside the peaked tomb just one week after Stanecroft. He was not denied his place beside his father; it was one sad consolation to his widow and Mary. To them the shock of his death, as it was unexpected, was utterly overwhelming. Our poor friend Kirstie's health and spirits broke down completely. She could no longer take her accustomed share in the management of the farm, for, as she pathetically said, "where's them that aye took the heavy end o't?"

Mary's life for the last four years had unfitted her for resuming her old occupations, which had at the heaviest been light. Blackburnfoot gone, everything seemed at a hopeless stand, the very means of comfort would run low.

Many friends advised. They were utterly unable to guide the farm so as to live by it; very strongly they were urged to let out the land to some able farmer, who would pay a good rent for it. And if they could not let the land without also letting the dwelling-house, they ought to submit, and make up their minds to leave it.

The thought filled Mary with dismay, but the widow said,—

“What does the place signify, Mary? What’s the place that we should say we can’t leave *it*, when them that were in ’t’s out o’t? We’ll never see *them* again go where we like. I a’most think it’s lonelier here than it could be anywhere. We’ll go an’ put past the long dull spring-time wi’ my sisters.”

An excellent tenant having appeared, by the beginning of March they were to leave.

They sat on the old fallen-down tablet in the burying-ground:—

“Ay,” said the widow, wiping her eyes as they rested on some appearance of sprouting leaves of the blue hyacinth, “just so; it’ll be as blue’s a cheeny plate by an’ by, an’ the flourish’ll be out; I’m a’most glad I’ll not be here to see ’t.”

Mary sat curled together, her face pale and worn,

as once it would have been hard to imagine her face would ever be.

She thought, with a dreamy longing, of her head at rest on a silken pillow in a coffin set over her father's; thought lovingly of the blue hyacinths and the flourish down here while they walked together in the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, waiting and watching for all they had loved here; loving and watching and waiting, without doubt and without fear, in the land where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.

She carefully planted some little jessamines she had brought against the wall beside the dismal grated window.

"Mother," she said, coming back and putting her arms round her, "when we're long dead and gone they'll shine like stars and smell so sweet, they'll never know who planted them."

Yet there was one she thought would know. He would sometimes come to see the starry flowers and dream of days gone by.

As they left the burying-ground the great sycamores twinkled with a shower of pinky leaf-buds, the song of the mavis resounded through the land, and the young lambs cried faintly in the March sunshine.

Nature dies and revives again. The old pass away, and the young begin anew.

* * * *

They were to go and bid them farewell at Stanecroft. Here they found much joy and excitement. A letter from George—the first since hearing that the minerals belonged to Stanecroft, not Blackburnfoot. He would be home as soon as was possible, and he had made a fortune. He had returned from a third expedition to the “diggin’s.” Each time his good fortune had exceeded the last. His success was, he believed, unprecedented; his agricultural training and steady habits had doubtless much to do with it, but his constant *good luck* had astonished everybody.

Mary and her mother were not shown the letter. They were not told how he expostulated against taking the Blackburnfoot minerals, how he begged of his father and mother to accept his new-found wealth, as some compensation for their loss.

Mary went home through the glen, weeping as she went, for it was the last time she would go through it, to her home so knit up with her very life, and her thought of George no longer suited her thought of the golden streets, and the starry flowers. He was not now the George she knew,

his life seemed all in hard-earned gold and greedy gain.

Hard-earned gold and greedy gain. Mary did him little less than justice. The desire of gold had laid hold of George Hamilton like a burning fever. Gold, gold, more gold, he saw nothing else, he thought of nothing else. The want of it had stood like a fate between him and 'all that was dear to him, and now wounded pride and pain of heart drove him on to acquire at least that qualification if it could be acquired by human energy. Even if Mary was not now within his reach, it was one solace to his wounded pride to prove that he would have been no dependent on her wealth, as aunt Jane had almost maddened him by hinting at.

He had returned from the "diggin's," after a great success the year before, to find a letter from Betsy, telling him how she had showed Mary his letter, how she had seemed much moved by it, but had made her promise never to say to him or to any one else that she had seen it, saying that she herself would write, and would take care to say all she wished said.

The coming of a letter from his mother, dated some three months later, forced on him the miserable conviction that, moved as Mary had been by the

pitiable avowal of his unforgetting love, she had coolly resolved not to write.

How he chafed restlessly at Betsy's showing the letter. He had strictly forbidden her to do so. How he went round and round all his old memories and all his later bitter trials, as a caged animal goes round rattling over all the wires of his prison house!

He was struck down by a fever, brought on by overtasked strength and anguish of heart. Had he had no such friends as the Grange family near, it might have gone hard with him; as it was, he soon cast it off. As soon as he was stronger, he was at the diggin's again, his thirst for gold more insatiable than ever, as his success proved greater than before.

After his return came the letter. He, not Mary, was the owner of all this wealth, and Mary was still unmarried. And the letter went on in vulgar fashion to give a sarcastic detail of all aunt Jane's efforts to entrap wealthy and fashionable suitors, and of her failure hitherto, nor did it spare Mary, as having been herself a party to such plans and prospects. How glad they would be to make up to him, George, now. It was his mother who tried to exasperate him by such taunts and insinuations, and

truth to say, her worldly mind had never believed in any other view of things. She never would believe that Mary would think of George. She could not get over the feeling that her son had been slighted and made nothing of, and it roused in her an unrelenting dislike, even though Mary, poor child, might not be immediately to blame. This dislike increased when she found that the wealth was her son's, not this silly girl's, whose friends had set light by him. George had had four years to forget her, surely he might now make up his mind to be done with her. In striving to alienate his love from her, she was not over careful to tell all the truth. She might have heard something of Mary's resolute refusal of the young laird of Elmtou, but of this she said no word.

What a dreary misery her pointed, satirical passages carried to the poor exile, reading in his log-house, in an atmosphere stifling as if the nightmare sat on his breast. All that had nerved him to gigantic exertion, that had revived his strength in prostration, all that had gone before him like a guiding spirit, all that was his dream of the pure and beautiful, dashed rudely to the earth, with vulgar mocking hand !

George Hamilton sat in dull, bewildered wretchedness. Mary, it might be, within his reach at last, for

this one reason, that he now was rich, while she was poor, unworthy of his love, his devotion to his own ideal of her proving him little but a fool.

Such bitter thoughts pursued him on his lonely path across the ocean, they turned his gold to dust and ashes: he had now wealth enough, wealth, alas! to tempt her to pretend to love him, when she loved him not. He might have given this to her, but she—no, she was not the Mary he had loved; that had been a mere phantom of his own creation.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A JOYLESS HOME-COMING.

The riche man ful fonde is i-wis
That wenith that he loved is;
If that his hert is understode
It is not he; it is his Gode.

The Romaunt of the Rose.

It was the end of May. Before aunt Jane's front windows unceasing rains lashed the silent street. At Stanecroft, the blustering winds, tearing and scattering the tender leafage, dashed rain-laden lilacs and laburnums against the narrow casement.

Mary sat in a low-roofed room in aunt Jane's area flat, its iron-grated window on a level with a dull back green, for here aunt Jane's kindness—which in her adversity was greater than the reader may suppose—allowed her unbroken solitude, and a good fire, and here she sat through the long May days, seeing no token of May-time but the rank length of the grass and dandelions that struggled up

to meet the sunshine, in that darksome, washing green. She had but one occupation, silent, thoughtful, needlework, for since her reverse of fortune her aunts had resumed the old business, and were, perhaps, the happier for it.

Mary and her mother had a sufficiency of this world's goods to supply their modest wants, but Mary liked the silent, steady occupation, and was pleased to help her aunts. Aunt Jane permitted her to sit and work at her own pleasure, provided no one knew she did so. Meanwhile her conversations with her lady patronesses, carried on by ejaculatory snatches as she smoothed plaits and fixed skilfully directed pins, ran thus,—

“Oh, just all owing to the unjustest will that ever was wrote! Ay, such reverses! And just found by the merest accident! Ay, such reverses! Ay, riches take to themselves wings!”

Such reflections were decidedly out of aunt Jane's way, she had little sympathy with them, but she knew that they had been used on such occasions by people of unquestionable gentility in all ages, and she looked on it as a proper thing to adopt them.

“What with the death of my brother-in-law, Mr. Hamilton of Blackburnfoot, and that, my sister,

and my niece have just took refuge with us. Their feelings is perfect shattered. Not that they haven't enough to live on comfortable enough, but a young lady brought up to everything of the stylistest, feels that as much as many a one would perfect beggary. Ah, poor thing, she just sits and mopes! Not that there's not them, and them that are real gentlemen, that's as anxious to get her without a penny as with it; but, poor thing, she can't make up her mind to nothing yet, and it's not to be expected she should. Oh, no, poor thing, she just sits and mopes!"

Aunt Jane insisted upon the sitting and moping. She never could have "moped" herself in any case; but she looked upon it as decidedly a genteel thing to do in the circumstances.

Mary had sat all day in her low room listening to the wind piping in the long long chimney, that rose to the height of four floors above aunt Jane's genteel front-door domicile. The wind moaned and whistled in the long vent with a wild sadness, the rain bubbled and guttered in the drain under the window. She sat working on mechanically, an undefined pain at her heart, as she pictured George at sea. She went to bed, but not to sleep. The wind screeched and howled now, and poor Mary

wept and prayed. At last she slept, but only to dream.

She stood by the sea-shore on a flat stone, just beyond the longest race of the crested waves, that tumbled on the beach with heavy stroke. Sometimes she feared a wave would break over her, but just as it reared in dauntless pride, it broke baffled, and the hissing foam ran over the pebbles, leaving its fringy margin just within the stone she stood on. Then a monster, topping over its brother furrows, came on towards the shore. Her heart failed, she would have retreated, but for a wish to see this boaster also laid low before the mighty mandate, "hitherto and no further." With an unutterable horror of darkness it towered icy cold before her, then broke over her head with a roar like thunder.

Then she lay on the shore suffocated, unable to move, while the wave sucked backwards, rolling the loose boulders with it. A shred of stained blue ribbon met her eye, and she saw it was one of the markers in George's Bible—that with Blackburnfoot on it.

She tried to cry, "It was no omen for good then!" but could utter no sound.

A huge wave came towards her bearing a black burden—a human form. She woke—a long shrill

cry echoing through the room—in the unutterable horror of nightmare. She hid her head, quaking and quivering, the guttering under her window, and the roar of the wind, still keeping up the picture fancy had drawn.

Next day the wind was less; the next, though it still rained heavily, the wind had fallen to a great calm.

Mary sat at her silent work, when voices in the passage above made her start. She rose hastily, then clung trembling to the table. She heard the mistress of Stanecroft speak and the girls' voices in weeping and lamentation.

At length she got strength to reach the parlour. Her eyes glared wildly from her white face at the mistress of Stanecroft, misery written on her features, and Eelin's helpless sobbing, while her mother stood, a letter in hand, repeating in her manner that was once so "cheery,"—

"He's all right now; you'll see he's all right by this time."

Her eyes fell on a little volume that lay tumbled open on the table, soaked and stained, discoloured scraps of ribbon looking from between the leaves—George's Bible with the markers.

Mary sank senseless on the floor.

When she came to consciousness, her mother sat supporting her head on her lap, rhyming in her ears,—

“And he’s found, Mary, and he’s doing well. Well seen to by a kind gentleman that sent down the Bible to let us know that it was him. So you needn’t all put yourselves so about.”

The Bible was sent with a letter from a little seaport town in Wales. A great Australian ship had gone to pieces a gun-shot from the shore. Many of the passengers had been saved by the lifeboats. The writer had walked on the beach in the fury of the storm, and at a point remote from the lifeboats, had picked up this little Bible, strongly bound together with a ribbon, thrown high on the beach. Searching with a powerful glass, believing that the owner might be on some rocks within sight, he had discovered a single figure stretched apparently lifeless. Twelve gallant fellows had risked their lives to save his if he were still in life, and by incredible exertions, succeeded in rescuing him from these dangerous rocks. His head was so injured by having been dashed on them, that he was then in a state of insensibility; and still, though all had been done that medical skill could devise, he was in a very critical condition. The name and ad-

dress furnished by the Bible, the writer hoped would enable him to find the poor fellow's friends; the book was doubtless his, as a note-book found in his pocket had the name, George Hamilton.

His mother and sisters took the first train to go to him, accompanied by the Reverend Mr. Bryson. Poor Mary was left behind in her speechless misery, made more hopeless by the memory of her terrible dream.

How much, much worse was George's return than his leaving had been, though that at the time had looked so terrible!

But what can be done in speechless misery but bear it speechlessly!

For many days tidings were little better. He lay in a state of weakness and prostration not short of dangerous. It was such hopeless misery to Mary! Oh, if now she could only tell him how she loved him, how she had always loved him! She employed herself writing over and over a letter, pouring out all the love and affection she had treasured up so many years. It seemed so easy to write such a letter then.

After a fortnight he was much better. The letters took a common worldlike tone again; wondered how the new house progressed; said how

soon they hoped to have their dear George home again. It was such a trial to him to think of the handsome fortune he had made all lying at the bottom of the sea.

Mary felt the pang of her poverty and his wealth again; her cheeks burned with shame at the thought of the letter she had spent so much time writing, and she consigned it to the flames in horror of herself.

Meanwhile, George lay in a dreamy convalescence, possessed by a quiet peace, to which he had long been a stranger, watching his mother and sisters moving through his room.

His gold that he had so longed and toiled and struggled to accumulate—his gold for evermore lost in the depths of the sea—but the gold fever had long since left him. He did not need it now.

Then he thought of the old fields, with lush grass, thick and tufted, of the joyous swinging of the boughs in the free air, the fresh June leaves, with unutterable longing.

“Keep the windows open, dear mother. Oh, mother, you can’t think what the voice of that mavis is to one that hasn’t heard it for four summers!”

The voice of the mavis led him surely to the Blackburnfoot. Poor Hamilton dead and gone, he was never to see him: dead, maybe, of a broken

heart. Then he must hear of Mary. Oh, that he could hear that she had been, though it were but in part, true to him! If even *now*, though not before, she could love him for himself, not for the minerals. Alas! he could get nothing from his mother and Eelin—Betsy had now left with her husband—but endless insinuations against her. Even now that Mr. Paterson he might remember, a handsome, and as it turned out a wealthy young man, was prodigiously made of by all of them, but with what success they couldn't say.

It is true that Alick Paterson was much made of, and visited much, at Grey Street. The widow seemed to have found a son in her old favourite, and it was a matter of great exultation over aunt Jane, that she had from the first seen "what a fine gentlemanly-disposed lad he was."

He had come to the Blackburnfoot to conduct them to the city, he had managed all their business arrangements for them, and many a dull evening in Grey Street he had enlivened by his cheerful company.

He was much made of, and heartily encouraged by all but Mary; there he felt that if he tried even the commonest attention, it was somehow an utter failure; so that Alick's kind heart, which had never

been that of a hero of romance, began to feel more as a sympathizing friend's, than a lover's, to the pale, sad-looking girl he had known so bright and happy.

But how should George's mother and sister know all this? they only knew that he was a supposed admirer, that he was much in the habit of evening visits at Grey Street, and that the widow and aunt Jane spoke of him in terms of the highest laudation. They rather thought it was all fixed, though doubtless, now that George was so much the wealthier, they would gladly break it off, if by so doing they could secure him. This low opinion of her relations was not affected by the mistress of Stanecroft, it was her honest settled conviction. They had no sooner found themselves wealthy, than they had so treated her son as that nothing would content him but to leave his country and his friends. Most honestly she disliked and thought meanly of them. Nor was George quite to blame in listening to her; he had had too much reason to suspect even Mary of this while almost a child: for her mother and aunt the thing was certain. And poor Mary had never been allowed an opportunity to prove that she was different. Then, she had not written to him.

George came with his mother to Stanecroft in the

end of June. His recovery was slow and tedious, because his mind was unhappy. At Stanecroft everything was as it had been, yet how changed! His mother and sister no longer lived in their old homely fashion; all his former pursuits seemed strange to him after his four years' absence. His father and his old friend were dead; the Blackburnfoot inhabited by strangers; and Mary—there was nothing but pain in the thought of Mary.

How mercilessly his mother misrepresented her! Even Betsy could only tell of how she not only had shown his letter, but told her of all his love and all his difficulties as plainly as she could; how Mary had begged her to keep it a secret from any one, had promised to write, and had not written. She would, however, they were sure, be delighted to write now, now that the wealth was his, not hers. Poor George! he wished the wealth was with his gold, at the bottom of the mighty deep.

He sent a sum of money to the widow as compensation, he said, for any loss in leaving her place, and mentioned a handsome yearly sum as the very lowest she could accept for allowing the minerals to be worked in her lands.

"A little like a gentleman," aunt Jane said.

It was bitter indeed to Mary. She was no

longer like the light of the sun to him, and instead of coming to see them, he sent them money.

So six long weeks wore past. How long to Mary, in the front-door floor, with the white pavement and the glaring sun! How long to George, in his beautiful homestead, with his old dreams, rising like ghosts to mock him.

Meanwhile the widow accepted her friend Mrs. J. Hamilton's pressing invitation, and went to Wellbrae. Mary could not be prevailed on to accompany her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REUNITED.

"O never say that I was false of heart,

* * *

As easy might I from myself depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie;
That is my home of love; if I have ranged,
Like him that travels, I return again."

SHAKESPEARE.

IT was the fifteenth of August, George had not called at Grey Street, and Mary knew now he wouldn't come. As the bright summer days wore past, aunt Jane's description of her sitting and moping was truer. All elasticity seemed gone out of her young life; so quiet and pale she grew, friends almost forgot it was so young a life. Five years before she had been preparing to go to school, not "out sixteen," but now she sat at her work so white and calm, sometimes Miss Catherine wondered if it was possible that she was, after all, dying of a "brokin' heart."

Mary sat alone in the parlour, for at this season there were so few lady visitors she could almost reckon on not being surprised, when she became aware that a visitor had entered, not a lady—but—her heart went like a waterfall, so at least it seemed to her ears. She had heard but a single tone of his voice, but that was enough.

He put off just so many minutes in the lobby, striving to hide his own tremor, as gave Mary time to collect herself. Then he entered, and they met with a very ordinary hand-shaking. For words, neither seemed to have any at command.

George, with nervous haste, produced a letter from Mrs. John Hamilton, and explained that she, having heard that he was to be in the city to-day on business, had called to request him to carry the letter, and to bring Mary that evening to Wellbrae.

Her mother, the letter said, was nervous and low-spirited, though Mrs. Hamilton hoped not ill. She wearied incessantly for Mary; she must come, and come that very day.

George waited Mary's decision.

At this juncture aunt Jane entered, and her appreciation of George, though still modified by old prejudice, was also much influenced by his possession of the minerals.

Mr. George must return to dinner, and Mary would be ready to go to Boniton by the evening coach.

George agreed. Aunt Jane was less hateful in his eyes than she had been to his imagination. Four long years must have improved her.

And for aunt Jane's increased civility, it was not altogether owing to his wealth. A certain simplicity and rusticity of his youthful appearance had passed away. The hard-featured, sharp-boned, somewhat intellectual handsomeness of his race, shone out in the man of nine-and-twenty. Aunt Jane had once thought him soft-looking. His tone and manner too were decidedly more cultivated. And still the open innocence and purity of the great blue eyes contrasted so interestingly with the ruddy brownness of the sunburnt face and the massive proportions of the shoulders. She would have been hard to please indeed not to have been pleased.

The streets looked strangely deserted as they walked to the coach-office. The summer grass sprang in bright patches between the paving-stones. Mary seemed to walk in a dream. The blank, dull houses and the dreary street, and all her own miserable duration there melted away from her; she felt unutterable peace only in the idea of again

reaching the beautiful quiet life which had once been hers. But when she sat in the coach as it rattled along, while George read a newspaper and did not once address her, a great sadness took mastery of her. How changed he was! How completely their old life had passed away! What a strange black mockery the world was!

At last the coach stopped and released its passengers from its stifling confinement. The evening was close and sultry. Mary gave her hand to George, who stood offering his.

"I can't tell how to manage, there is not a carriage to be had. You can't walk all that way, you look tired already."

They were the first familiar words he had addressed to her, and there was more in the look than in the words. Mary assured him she liked the walk, and they went on their way in silence.

They found themselves beside a garden in an angle of the road on the outskirts of the town. A rich amber light illuminated the red berries that hung like rubies on the trees of fairyland, and steeped the red red fuchsias and flag-roses in its dreamland tint.

Some sudden memory came over Mary; she cried,—

"Do ye mind, George?" and stopped short and blushed as if she had altogether forgotten herself.

George "humphed," not unlike "Mr. Burchell," and walked on.

Mary's eyes filled with tears. She turned and gazed long and wistfully on the garden. Every Sunday of olden times her father and mother and George and she had passed this garden in going to and coming from church. How often they two had run before, that they might have time to stand and gaze at its splendours of flower and fruit, comparing them with keen interest with what they themselves could boast! Now George would not so much as turn his head to look at it, he didn't care to remember it. It kept her in sad musing most of the way home. She did not once observe the long furtive glances George stole at her sorrowful face.

"Mary," he said, coming to her side, "there's a thunderstorm coming, could you walk faster?"

She started at his sudden speech and looked up. There truly was a strange unearthly hue over everything, it had not been only her fancy. In the west hung,—

"The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
With shadow-streaks of rain."

The oak copse on one side their path shivered restlessly, its leaves shining transparent emerald against the ink-black cloud that brooded over it. A dull yellow light, that seemed to come up from the other side, illuminated the upland ledge to the right, setting a group of surly-visaged black cattle in strong relief against the open sky.

A bit of high country road, desolate and unkindly to the eye of a stranger, but for Mary, her very soul and spirit drank of a fountain of rest and peace as she gazed on the picture before her, after her dreary durance in the blank wilderness of an ugly street, so strange, so hard and pitiless to her. At home, almost at home! To compare smaller with infinitely greater things, the passionate longing of a young and sensitive spirit for a lost home such as this, is almost like the cry of the soul of the weary for that everlasting rest.

But it was not home, not her home. Her father, her friend!

Mary's carefully collected forces broke down in sudden and passionate weeping, all her gathered strength giving way before the overpowering memory of her strange loneliness.

George felt her grief to be for her father and her home, but somehow she was soon in his arms,

hiding her face in his bosom, and weeping more quietly. Mary's tears, and such passionate tears, what was he, that he could stand before them?

"Mary, my Mary," he whispered, trembling, "could you come back to me? Do you think you could try to come back to me?"

"Come back to you, George?" she asked, raising her head, and fixing tearful eyes on his face. "Come back to you? When did ever *I* leave *you*, George?"

* * * * *

The blue forked lightning glared through the scatterling belting of ragged firs that still guarded the entrance to Wellbrae. Mary stood holding to George's arm with a nervous trembling, she had never known before in a storm, till a heavy thunder-peal had passed. What if she must die just as she was so happy, so happy, and so fain would live? She leaned her white face down on his arm, and prayed silently.

Her mother wandering with nervous restlessness from room to room, watching for her coming through the brooding, lurid light, cried to Mrs. J. Hamilton, who was hiding affrighted in a corner,—

"And here they come, and she was leaning her head down on his arm."

Mrs. Hamilton forgot her fears to come to the window and see them approach arm in arm.

"Yes, there they are, the pair made for each other, that we took so much pains to make unhappy."

"There is no doubt I was to blame," sighed poor Kirstie; "but for all that, George is prouder than he need be. There never was a day when if he had come to us, I would ha' been as proud to see him as if he had been my own son. And for the goodman——"

"May God bless them now," said Mrs. Hamilton, warmly, striving to turn the widow's thoughts. But that was done by the rain which came down as if it had again a command to drown the world. George came leading Mary as if he had rescued her from a watery grave.

Had cousin John been present, George's days might now have been numbered, because of the warmth with which he caught Mrs. J. Hamilton in his arms, and imprinted a kiss on her fair brow. She was, he said, the dearest, the kindest woman, with the finest head in the whole world. And at this moment cousin John did appear, and rubbed his hands, and chuckled and cried,—

"Ay, ye've found out that; I kent aye ye wad find that out; there's no mony women has a heid like that."

Mrs. John Hamilton laughed and blushed, delighted as ever to be loved and praised, and Mary drew her mother from the room.

"Mother, he loves me! Oh, mother, how he loves me!"

The mother clasped her, drenched and tearful, to her heart.

"Thank God, my daughter! And he's as guid's he's braw, but an' if ye live to the age o' Methuselah ye can never be no happier than your father an' me was before ye."

* * * * *

The wedding was unavoidably a sad one, for it was cousin John with all his oddities, not her own gentle-souled father, that gave away the bride, and she left, not the roof that had sheltered her infancy, but the comparatively unfamiliar Wellbrae.

In acknowledgment of his faithful kindness, Alick Paterson stood George's groomsman, and not a year had passed away till another had to perform the same good office for him, when he and Eelin

joined hands, a marriage which pleased the mistress much more than poor Betsy's.

* * * * *

Would the reader like a glimpse of Mary's after life? It is a sabbath afternoon, seven years after the wedding, that was accidentally sad, but intrinsically full of a most blessed happiness.

Already somewhat softened by time, stands a modern mansion-house, where the "preacher's beech" hard by commands the far-reaching view of the valley of Boniton, and the hills beyond.

From the right, the rushing stream in the rocky linn below is heard, as Mary heard it when the redbreasts sang among its birken braes that afternoon before she first left for Mrs. Bright's school.

From the left, the clanking of the chains and pulleys of the village well, breaks yet on the silence of the summer evening.

The gate of a paradise opens, a garden of trees, shrubs, vegetables, fruits, and flowers, blended together in luxuriant loveliness. George appears, Mary leaning on his arm. There is something peculiar in the meeting of their eyes. Never was love so tried, so strong, making so much the unity

of either life, so confident, that what has been the sum of life here will not perish in the life that is beyond.

Two cherub boys rush upon the crape-draped figure that comes next.

"Oh, grandmother, such a moth little Christian's found! Come quick, grandmother, come and see it."

They draw suddenly up and fix open eyes on her, wonderingly and somewhat uneasily, for they know by the starry flowers, held with her snowy handkerchief, and the red morocco Bible their grandfather once gave her, that she has been looking through the grating where the dusty sunbeam shines into the dreary stone niche, where he is laid.

Our old friend Kirstie holds the jasmine flowers for them to smell to, looks at them with fond pride, then trudges off to see their treasures without one dismal word. "They must come through it all soon enough," says the good woman.

When the boys grew into great coal and iron men—for these treasures were found to be only deeper hid in Stanecroft than in the Blackburnfoot—to their latest years the flowers of the jasmine brought a thought of heaven, for it grew on the tomb in the shadow of the great sycamores, where

their mother had planted it, and she looked so with her eyes when she came with it in her hands from looking through the iron grating.

The memory of Blackburnfoot and of Mary did not perish, so pure a light leaves a long twilight.

THE END.

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